

# ial

## Issues in Applied Linguistics

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Volume 7 Number 2 • December 1996

**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND EDUCATION**

### **ARTICLES**

#### **Desire and Discipline in Primary Education**

Dennis A. Lynch and Sharon L. Hilles

#### **Pragmatic Issues Related to Reading**

##### **Comprehension Questions:**

##### **A Case Study From a Latino Bilingual Classroom**

Margaret Field

#### **Some Problematic Channels In the Teaching of Critical Thinking in Current L1 Composition Textbooks: Implications for L2 Student-Writers**

Vai Ramanathan and Robert B. Kaplan

#### **Teachers' Discursive Practices:**

##### **Co-Construction of their Group Voices**

Myriam N. Torres

#### **What do Foreign Language Learners Do in Their Academic Reading?**

Liyang Cheng



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*Issues in Applied Linguistics* is published twice a year by the graduate students of the Department of TESL & Applied Linguistics at UCLA.

The views expressed in the journal are not necessarily those of the Editors, the UCLA Department of TESL & Applied Linguistics, or the Regents of the University of California.

*IAL* is printed at Lue's Printers: Los Angeles, California.

Partial funding for *IAL* is provided by the UCLA Graduate Students Association.

*IAL* is abstracted in *Linguistics and Learning Behavior Abstracts (LLBA)*, on *Comserve*, and is listed in the *MLA International Bibliography*.

*IAL*'s European distributor is LINCOM EUROPA.

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## Editorial

### Applied Linguistics and Education

This special issue of *ial* arrives at a time when language and education are increasingly appearing together on the front page of newspapers. The recent fervor over "Ebonics" in the state of California, and the multiple interpretations of the Oakland school board's policy suggest how politically, interactionally, and sociolinguistically complicated today's classrooms can be. Recognizing the layering of issues involved in educational research, today's classroom researchers necessarily look beyond the statistical demographics of educational failure. To understand the Oakland school board's policy decision, as well as ongoing debate over "bilingual education," researchers must look in detail to both the language practices that go on inside the classroom, and the kinds of language practices students bring with them to the classroom. This twofold attention to contextualized language use both in and out of school is one of the most important contributions applied linguistics can bring to educational research. Working in this area, authors in this volume of *ial* deal with both the minute structuring of language in the classroom, as well as with the linguistic habits and presuppositions students and teachers bring to the classroom from other realms.

As Hugh Mehan illustrated in 1979, classroom talk is interactionally patterned and rule-governed. Since Mehan's seminal work many other analysts of classroom discourse have noticed that school-based knowledge is organized in ways which some students, but not others, can access. Instead of functioning as the leveling device imagined by Dewey (1943), public education more often reproduces social strata of the larger society. In this volume, both of the interviews and two of the articles address the way close attention to discourse in the classroom can illuminate this process. The article by Dennis Lynch and Sharon Hilles illustrates precisely how a teacher's goal to teach apparently neutral "academic skills," is embedded in institutionalized practices so that the classroom simultaneously socializes students into norms, sometimes unpleasant ones, typical of society at large. This article also suggests, however, that there is a potential flexibility in the necessarily scripted classroom practice. This flexibility can lead to either the reproduction or the change of societally scripted roles.

This recognition of the cultural presuppositions behind an apparently neutral curriculum can also be seen in current research in literacy. Recent work in "multiple literacies" (see, for example, Street, 1993, and the chapters within) conceptualize classroom activity as only one among many kinds of literacy, the construction of a particular type of knowledge. Discourse patterns in the classroom can be an important resource for researchers as they identify these multiple literacies.

In this volume, Margaret Field's article examines the language of reading lessons to problematize the kinds of comprehension questions novice readers are expected to answer uniformly. Her analysis suggests that native Spanish speakers have difficulty when asked to make inferences about the thoughts or feelings of characters in a text. By looking closely at classroom discourse to investigate the different *kinds* of knowledge in play, Field's article deconstructs the notion of one "neutral" understanding of even an elementary school reader. Similarly, Vai Ramanathan and Robert Kaplan's article, through the analysis of several composition textbooks, questions the generalizability of writing teaching techniques, specifically the concept of "critical thinking skills" as applied to non-native speakers of English. Ramanathan and Kaplan illustrate that this construct is not a neutral one, and not easily extended across different languages/cultures.

The concept of "multiple literacies", while focussing researchers closely on discourse within the classroom, has also led researchers to look outside the classroom in order to understand the origins of demographic variability in scholastic achievement. Since Susan Philips' work on Native American and school-based regulation of time (1974), and Shirley Brice Heath's research on home and school narrative styles (1984), more classroom researchers have begun to look at cross-cultural differences between home and school discourse patterns in order to arrive at greater educational efficacy in classrooms. Moll and Diaz (1987) and Gonzalez et al. (1995) have not looked as closely at discourse patterns, but they have suggested more generally that "funds of knowledge" brought from home must be integrated into the classroom if schools are to provide equal educational opportunity.

Fewer studies, however, have explored the diverse "funds of knowledge" that *teachers* bring to the classroom—the kinds of assumptions socialized through the language of teacher training. Myriam Torres' article in this volume investigates the discourse of practicing teachers in a masters degree program, to see how their "group voices" are created. Her article has important implications for those interested in the relationship between theory and practice, and the manner in which teachers function simultaneously as practitioners and as intellectuals with sociopolitical interests. Liying Cheng's article also looks at teachers' knowledge, and uses their feedback to add validity to her statistical findings about the relevance of reading instruction in an ESL training program for graduate students.

The role of the teacher as theorist and practitioner, and the issues of situated literacy are taken up again in the two interviews in this volume. In her interview with David Olsher, Deborah Poole states that, though trained as a researcher, her goals as an applied linguist are educational. By looking specifically at language, her work highlights the types of misunderstandings that continually occur in today's classrooms, and looks to possible solutions through discourse analysis. Kris Gutierrez, in an interview with Myrna Gwen Turner, also discusses her work as a classroom researcher and how her own life history as a bilingual Latina has shaped her views on literacy and culture in the classroom. Her insights shed light on some

of the same issues posed by Field's research in bilingual classrooms (this volume). Both Poole and Gutierrez stress the important relationship between theory and practice, and are inspiring examples of the value of discourse analysis in the classroom.

The necessarily situated study of language is also taken up in the book reviews in this volume. In particular, David Nordlund's review essay critiques Pinker's (1994) book *The Language Instinct*. Nordlund takes a sociocultural perspective, arguing that *The Language Instinct*, though clearly a brilliant book, does not describe a language instinct at all, but a grammar instinct, and ignores the socializing forces behind language use. *ial* welcomes commentary on this review and we look forward to carrying ongoing dialogue on this topic. Olga Solomon's review of Dell Hymes' *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality* also addresses the way language and sociopolitical realities shape one another, and Hirohide Mori's review of *Input and Interaction in Language Acquisition*, a collection edited by Clare Gallaway and Brian J. Richards, suggests that even traditional work in language acquisition is beginning to take a more situated and process oriented perspective.

While none of the work in this volume addresses the topics of bilingual education or "Ebonics" *per se*, the articles before you, like a great deal of the current work in applied linguistics, illustrate the collective development of a conceptual apparatus to deal with such issues. We are used to reading reports on test scores in the daily papers, or even lamenting editorials over rising dropout rates or the unjust demographics of school failure. But the circular nature of editorial commentary on these issues suggests that even these debates are more rhetorical than practical. As evidenced by the Ebonics controversy, there is a general recognition of the importance of applied linguistic research in the classroom, but a confusion as to how language practices relate to improved education. Applied linguists certainly cannot resolve the debate over the proper role of Ebonics in the schools, but by looking closely at language in the classroom and out, the applied linguist can begin to reach a more nuanced understanding of the issue. This edition of *ial*, devoted to language and schools, gives a sampling of the kinds of issues applied linguists working in education can effectively investigate.

December 1996

Betsy Rymes

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# Desire and Discipline in Primary Education

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*This paper, based on a three-year participant observer study in a southwestern inner city elementary school, holds that understanding the dynamic nature of the struggle between desire and discipline in an elementary school setting is crucial because those competing forces and the ensuing struggle are a major force in a child's secondary socialization. Our observations suggest that even very young children acquiesce to and resist authority in many ways, and in doing so learn lessons often more complicated than most of our assumptions will allow. We argue that these lessons, which are often contradictory, are born out of the tension between institution and inclination, between deference and autonomy, and between respect for authority and self-respect—a tension that is not resolvable, but that can be collectively lived with in better and worse ways.*

## INTRODUCTION

The following study is based on data which were gathered as part of a three year participant/observer project in an inner city school in the southwestern United States. A good portion of the time was spent with Mr. Stevens, a dynamic, socially committed European-American primary grade teacher in his late 20s. As far as the school administration was concerned and by most institutional measurements, such as school, district, and state standardized tests, he was an effective and successful teacher, albeit a very traditional one. Observations were conducted weekly for 1-3 hours. Field notes, video tapes, observations of Mr. Stevens and other teachers (both in the classroom and out), interviews with children, with Mr. Stevens and his colleagues, administrators and school personnel, written reports from the school and the district, examinations, samples of student work and student records, and statistics as reported in the newspaper, by the school, and by the district are all part of the data base.

In this paper, we isolate three scenarios from the data and analyze them in terms of what Jacoby and Ochs (1995) call micro-ethnography, which is a close analysis of "...bounded, situated activities not only as microcosms of larger cultural structures, but as loci and media for the interactional engendering of these structures" (p. 175). Before we talk further about what we are hoping to do, perhaps it is important to specify what we are not attempting. We are not addressing



the topic of various literacies, assessing educational practices or competing pedagogical strategies, discussing the hegemonic effects of hidden curricula or evaluating teacher effectiveness. We are not recommending any particular course of action, nor are we claiming that we have discovered a panacea for, or even a way to ameliorate the myriad of problems that admittedly plague inner city schools and linguistic minorities. Our aim is considerably more modest. We are simply attempting to explore how the complex dynamic between desire and discipline (Foucault, 1972) operates within three classroom situations seen as discursive social spaces of power. In doing so, we attempt to answer the following question: What lessons might children learn about how to learn (Bateson, 1972 [1942]) as the result of being caught between what Foucault (1972, p. 215) describes as "ritual forms" prescribed by our institutions and what is variously experienced as an excess, as dangerous, wayward impulse, or as deviation from one's role that is nevertheless complexly tied to that role (inclination)?

### INCLINATION VS. INSTITUTION

Foucault calls the interactions just described "dynamic" (p. 217) because we experience the effects of each (institution and inclination) only through the various ways they become related to one another, that is, the various ways they call each other forth, structure each other, and keep each other in play, both in our everyday practices and through processes of socialization. The tension between inclination and institution that Foucault uses to frame his lecture *Discourse on Language* (1972) also connects with his later discussions of power (1979, 1980, 1982). Language and power are not, in his view, human attributes or social media, though our language sometimes leads us to treat them as if they were. Instead, language and power are historical, institutionalized, and interrelated sites of struggle, areas of social activity where much is at stake. As such, they are bounded on one side by ambiguous expectations of autonomy, and on the other by the ways our activities get normed or institutionalized (e.g., into roles, procedures, job descriptions, etc.). According to Foucault, then, a great deal hangs on precisely how we understand and resist the undesirable effects of institutionalized discourse and power (i.e., isolation, subjection, loss of agency, and the uncritical reproduction of institutional roles) given that we cannot escape the conditions that produce these effects.

### POWER AND CHILDREN

The concepts of *desire*, *institution*, and *power* may seem more appropriately applied to adult activities, to Foucault's own dilemmas, or to corporate or prison life than, say, to the lives of school children. However, our observations indicate that the tension between desire and discipline operates in a first grade classroom in much the way that it does in "adult" contexts. Moreover, the ques-

tion of how this affective tension affects the site of secondary socialization is an especially inviting one (Worsham, 1992-1993). According to Berger and Luckman (1966), secondary socialization, which begins to take place in school, is the "...acquisition of role-specific knowledge, the roles being directly or indirectly rooted in the division of labor" (p. 138). This type of socialization includes the acquisition of lexical items specific to certain roles, the "internalization of semantic fields structuring routine interpretations and conduct within an institutional area" and "affective correlations". It also includes "the rudiments of a legitimating apparatus" and "identification with a role and its appropriate norms" *inter alia* (pp. 138-139). The lessons that children learn at this time, therefore, should not be seen as local or limited because they serve to position children within a social field that ultimately delimits how they will see and appreciate (Bourdieu, 1984) what is possible, almost possible, barely possible, or not possible at all.

Secondary socialization within institutionalized education is for the most part unavoidable, and it may even be preferable to most available alternatives, but institutionalized education is also permeated by forms of power. It therefore has a profound effect, which is not always positive, on children, and, in less obvious but equally real ways, on those who teach them. The teaching strategies willingly or unwittingly employed, the ways work and play are divided, the ways private thoughts and feelings are pulled onto a public stage, and the ways authority is exercised or dismissed, bounce children back and forth between actions that elicit desire and reactions that control and channel that desire. The elementary students we observed, who otherwise struggled in so many ways, nevertheless were quick to develop a repertoire of behaviors for coping with the twin forces of individuation and institutionalization. In fact, their competence in this area provides support for Foucault's arguments (1979, 1980, 1982) that institutions and the forms of power they embody, such as structures of authority, management tactics, forms of subjection and submission, are not unqualifiedly oppressive. They are always there with us. We are always in and a part of them. We simply learn together to live with them in better and worse ways at different times and under different exigencies. Our observations suggest that it is certainly possible for even very young children, as well as the adults who work with them, to position themselves and others in ways that tend to "redirect the unfolding of discourse such that individual understandings, human relationships, and the social order might be changed" (Jacoby & Ochs, 1995, p. 178); that is, to reproduce institutional relationships with a difference (Butler, 1992).

### Co-Construction of Institutional Roles

Our observations lead us to believe that institutionalized roles with their attendant desires and disciplines find a proper home on both sides of the fence, in teachers and in students, even though only the latter will be the concern of this paper. In other words, we have observed that teachers and students co-construct (in the sense of Duranti & Brenneis 1986; Jacoby & Gonzales, 1991; Jacoby &

Ochs 1995; Rymes 1995, 1996 and sources cited therein) both the desire/discipline dynamic and corresponding relations of power. It then follows that the tangle of desire and discipline we are discussing shapes both institutional roles, student *and* teacher, as well as the scope of their interactions and possibilities for resistance and change.

## DEUTERO-LEARNING

Over fifty years ago, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson warned that perhaps students learn more than just reading, writing, and arithmetic in their classroom lessons. Bateson (1972 [1942]), in a response to Mead, argued that students also learn how to learn, or how to perform similar tasks in the future. He called this "deutero-learning," and he defined deutero-learning as "a sort of habit which is a by-product of the learning process" (p. 164). It is "...that class of abstract habits of thought which are acquired by a process which we may equate with learning to learn," (p. 166). Put differently, deutero-learning is "...a habit of looking for contexts and sequences of one type rather than another, a habit of punctuating the stream of events to give repetitions of a certain type of meaningful sequence" (p. 166). Bateson felt that "the states of mind which we call free will, instrumental thinking, dominance, passivity, etc., are acquired by a process which we may equate with learning to learn" (p. 166) and that these habits or dispositions are acquired in a number of complex ways.

Deutero-knowledge, then, would include ways of seeing things, perceiving and organizing experience, constructing categories, selecting what is background and what is foreground (Goodwin, 1996; Koshik, 1996), seeing what is important and what is not, in short determining what becomes a functional aspect of our world and what does not. This notion of deutero-learning resonates with Bourdieu's habitus (1977), "a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures" (p. 76), a structured tendency to behave and perceive, to experience and organize experience in particular ways, although we would have to stipulate that deutero-learning, if it can be equated with habitus at all, is that aspect of habitus acquired as a by-product of *early* formal learning *per se*. Deutero-learning also resonates with aspects of "stocks of knowledge" (Schutz, 1962), "mutual knowledge" (Giddens, 1979), "mundane knowledge" (Pollner, 1987), and "common sense knowledge" (Garfinkel, 1967), especially in so far as those notions are acquired "on the way to" learning. In other words, deutero-learning subtly changes a person's social trajectory as it alters, shapes, and constructs the social field within which one's sense of self, agency, and possibilities for action emerge. Deutero-learning slips into Ochs' "deep culture" (personal communication) and thus is no longer visible, "suspended" as one is in "webs of significance which he himself has spun" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). It is also not up for question or scrutiny because it becomes part of business as usual, of how things are done (Hilles & Lynch, 1992). Deutero-lessons are obviously an important part of secondary socialization, espe-



cially, as we argue here, those born out of the institutionally structured tension between desire and discipline.

## FORMS OF POWER VS. RELATIONS OF POWER

For the purposes of this paper, we will crucially rely on a distinction, again taken from Foucault (1979, 1980, 1982), between *forms* of power and *relations* of power. Most of us are used to thinking of power in terms of *forms* rather than *relations*. In other words, questions of power usually call to mind the concepts of domination, exploitation and (since Foucault) subjection, all of which are forms of power, rather than the field of social action, or as Foucault describes it, the “dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions without being exactly localized in them...” (1980, p. 96) and which constitute *relations* of power.

Forms of power often derive their force and legitimacy directly from the institutional setting. They manifest themselves, for instance, in uncritically assimilated institutional roles: in going along with how things have always been done, in simple reprimands, in prescribed curricula and mandated materials (McCormick, 1994), in unexamined teacher lore (Harkin, 1991), and in the ways teachers learn to divide, distribute, and pace student learning, etc. Forms of power tend to isolate people, vertically as well as horizontally. They isolate teachers from students and employers from employees, but they also isolate students from students, teachers from teachers, employers from employers, and employees from employees.

Relations of power, by contrast, are less obvious, even to the academically trained eye. Relations of power tend to connect people. They ally, and they are more flexible, ambiguous, and reversible than forms of power. Relations of power still involve power, of course, which is to say they are actions taken on others’ actions, or on the field of possible actions (Foucault, 1982, p. 220). They thus manifest the same risks and dangers that mark all social life (cf. Duranti, 1988), but since they pass “through institutions...without being exactly localized in them,” relations of power, as Foucault conceives them, harbor possibilities for changing our social conditions. Relations of power are also fragile, though. They rely on our careful efforts to consider how what we do positions others to act or react in more or less productive ways, and on our willingness to let others affect us as much as we affect them (though not always in the same ways). This way of conducting ourselves, of being with others, or of being responsible to others prevents relations of power from calcifying into forms of power. Forms of power resist change and constitute and maintain the status quo. Relations of power, on the other hand, which might be manifested as making unexpected alliances, fashioning and refashioning institutional roles, playing parts of institutions or institutional roles off each other, etc., permit change within established institutional settings. If Foucault is right, and if learning is fundamentally about change, the implications for the classroom are obvious.

## CONFLICTING DEUTERO-LESSONS ABOUT AUTHORITY AND AUTONOMY

Much of what goes on in any learning situation is necessarily about authority; authority is both a given and a site of negotiation. Students arrive at school already familiar, to varying degrees, with what authority is and how it operates, and yet they still resist it in various ways. More importantly, they must be able to do so, if they are to become active, self-motivated learners, "real players," albeit players within the limits set down by the social fields they have inherited and upon which they play and later will be playing.

In the example that follows, Mr. Stevens works with one of the least proficient children in his class. It is the last week of school. The child is working on a one place multiplier and a two placed multiplicand. He can do all of the subroutines alone, but he can't put them all together by himself. He can, however, accomplish the task while working with Mr. Stevens. This is a prime example, to our mind, of working with a child in Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" (1986). For us, it exemplifies both what is best and what is most questionable about the exercise of authority.

(1)

((Children are working silently and individually on a math work sheet. Mr. S is walking around the room monitoring children's work. Something appears to catch his eye in C's work. He walks to C's desk.))

01        S: **eight one time. what's eight one time**

02        [

03        ((points to problem, pulls hand back))

04        C: ((child writes))

05        S: **ka:y. five two times**

06        [

07        ((points to problem, pulls hand back))

08        C: ((repeats to self)) **five two times**

09        S: **five and five**

10        ((puts one hand down on the table and then the other with  
11        fingers spread out as a memory cue))

12        C: ((writes))

13        S: **nine one time**

14        ((points and withdraws hand))

16        S: **seven two times**

17        **seven and seven ar::e**

18        [

19        ((child {starts writing}))

20        [good=

21        =five three times=this is a five=this is a five=this is a five.  
22        count by fives.

- 23 C: **five, ten, fifteen** ((begins to write))  
 24 ((Mr. S leans back and watches as child writes))  
 25 [   
 26 S: [nuh uh=  
 27 C: =((turns over pencil and erases. Mr. S watches. As soon as  
 28 child finishes writing S begins again.))  
 29 S: **Six two times=six and six are** ((hits table in rhythm children  
 30 have used as a memory aid))

The little boy is ostensibly getting a lesson in math, but at the same time he is getting a deuterio-lesson about learning as a social activity and this lesson is embedded in both institutionalized forms of power (teacher/student roles) and in the possibilities inherent in the relations of power that cut across classroom spaces, for instance, when collaborative practices modify an otherwise strict teacher/learner relationship.

Such practices notwithstanding, almost all child/adult activities in Western society involve an uneven distribution of power because those with more status, knowledge, and experience, and those with institutional authority inevitably exercise their power. Indeed, two of the constitutive elements of a zone of proximal development (or in any novice-expert activity) are the one who has more knowledge or skill and the one who has less. This sort of relationship is unquestionably an effective way to teach children in Western societies (but see Heath, 1983; Ochs, 1988; Phillips, 1983; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984) and may be essential to Western, middle-class cognitive development (Rogoff, 1990); it also may be an essential step in the child's forming some sort of agency, and an interim step to the child's taking the task in hand and performing competently without the presence of someone more experienced. Nevertheless, activities structured around the novice/expert axis also impart deuterio-lessons about learning *qua* activity and agency. They may demonstrate to the students, for instance, that learning is something best done in the company of authority, and that agency, their agency, is grounded in that authority.

In the scenario we are examining, the student is learning that before one acquires the necessary knowledge to act "freely" with respect to two-place multiplicands, one must allow one's desire to be constructed and channeled according to an external plan. Taken to its extreme, the deuterio-lesson being learned is that knowledge resides with and is dispensed by a legitimately constituted authority and that acquiring knowledge, and agency with respect to that knowledge, demands that one enter into relationships that co-construct the self as a novice and the other as an expert, thereby delimiting one's active understanding of what knowledge is and the agency it produces. We hasten to add that we are not claiming that such relationships are damaging in and of themselves or that they are always taken to such an extreme. We are certainly not saying that they are avoidable or should always be avoided. We are simply pointing out there is more being learned here

than how to multiply. The student's possibilities for autonomy are tied to and managed by initial acts of submission, under this approach, and what is more, the dynamic authority/submission/autonomy must be co-constructed, not imposed from without, if knowledge is "to happen."

In Mr. Stevens' traditional classroom, the role of "teacher" is very clearly co-constructed as the central authority within an institutional context, and from our observations, much of what students learn beyond their daily lessons involves the dynamics of authority and autonomy. Authority, as we have seen, can be taken as the primary source of legitimate knowledge and agency. It is also the source of the most perspicuous uses of power. Students learn early, for example, that authority has the right to control their bodies and their possessions. They must ask and obtain permission before going to the bathroom, before speaking, and before leaving their chairs. They must sit down, stand up, line up, eat, play, and put their hands up and their heads down, when, where, and in the manner that they are told. If a child is "playing" with something the teacher deems distracting or inappropriate, the teacher may take the possession away from the student, at least temporarily. Moreover, in this classroom, establishing legitimate autonomy as a doer of multiplication problems, for instance, occurs only under the aegis of that central authority. It is a procedure that requires one be kindly regarded by and subsequently assisted by that authority, the dispenser of knowledge and necessary catalyst for agency. Nature may lend a hand in a teacher's kindly disposition toward the young (Gould, 1980), but negotiating some sort of autonomy and agency in such an environment is problematic, to say the least.

Authority also has the right to control the children's attention. Mr. Stevens' students quickly learn that they must be, or at least appear to be, focused as his authority directs. They must pay attention to the teacher, to the story, to the book, to their math problems, etc. They are required to focus their attention on whatever the teacher tells them to, and failure to do so is sanctionable ("Bobby, what are you looking at? Eyes up here, Samantha!"). In the segment above, the child's attention does not wander once. He looks either at his paper, at his fingers to count, or at Mr. Stevens. He doesn't look away until close to the end of the interaction, when he disengages his gaze and rubs his eyes and yawns. He is beginning to show signs of wear. Mr. Stevens' prompts have been relentless, and the child finally seems worn out. Having already adjusted to the role of authority in the learning process, he offers no overt objection to continuing. Instead, he rubs his eyes and yawns. At this point in the video, it appears he simply can't pay attention any longer, and Mr. Stevens also seems to read him this way. He appears to conclude that the child is no longer capable of attending and moves on.

This interaction between teacher and student has ambiguous results, though. On one hand, the student's actions could be construed as showing signs of agency: he has escaped the scrutiny of authority. At the same time, however, he loses his connection with the teacher *as a relation of power*, a connection with risks, but also with possibilities to offer. As a result, the student-teacher interaction, because



of how the situation is set up and the various conflicting deuterio-lessons already absorbed, slowly shifts, from a relation of power toward a form of power.

At this point it might be prudent to reiterate that relations of power are always moving along a continuum. Suspended as they are within forms of power, they always risk encroachment by those forms. Relations of power are not absolute, in other words, nor absolutely assured, particularly in the types of situations we have been observing. The teacher remains the teacher, the student the student. The forms of power and the assumptions, norms and procedures that the roles, teacher and student, prescribe, are always present and operative, but the possibility for developing, maintaining, and extending relations of power also remains present, especially when working within the Zone of Proximal Development or under Guided Participation (Rogoff, 1990). In fact, as an anonymous *ial* reviewer pointed out, "it is our self-consciousness about this process that can lead to using the inherently collaborative and practice oriented nature of knowledge to resist...forms [of power] or move toward relations [of power]."

Recall that relationships of power also require that one position others and take actions which structure others' potential fields of action, in a manner that increases the range of possibilities others can see and appreciate. In the closing moments of the segment we are discussing, the teacher's action does not seem to extend the student's power. The same is true of the student's actions. It appears that the student is finished. It seems clear that he does not want to continue, yet he has no real, productive way through his relationship to the teacher to straightforwardly conclude the lesson.

If we have interpreted the situation correctly, the student's choices regarding his own desire to end the activity are exceedingly limited. He can continue the session even though he doesn't want to and submit himself to further questioning; or he can refuse to submit, but most likely Mr. Stevens (or others, probably even the child himself) would not see this as an institutionally acceptable course of action. Amazingly, the most felicitous course of action seemed to unfold all by itself: the child became tired and *unable* to continue. Understand that we are not saying for a moment that this is a conscious choice on the part of the child or that his actions are duplicitous, although they very well may be. It is impossible to know; it is also unimportant because whether he has become tired so he won't have to continue, or can't continue because he has become tired is irrelevant. In either case, the deuterio-lesson is the same. Covert resistance (being too tired to continue) rather than overt resistance (refusing to continue) or overt submission (continuing even though one does not want to) is thoroughly efficacious.

Interestingly enough, the child's behavior positions Mr. Stevens in such a way that he too now has less room to maneuver. He must let the child off the hook and move on; after all, the child is not being willful or rebellious. He is not refusing to continue. He has done his best, and now he is tired. One cannot fault him for that, so Mr. Stevens and the child find themselves moved to end the lesson, and by doing so, their actions fold neatly back into their institutional roles.

One cannot help but notice the conflicting deutero-lesson here about autonomy and authority, as it is born out of the tension between desire and discipline. Passive, covert resistance is the only possible lesson one can learn from a situation in which autonomy itself is covertly made dependent upon authority (as the deferred outcome of "initial" acts of submission). Put otherwise, one can exercise power and agency by diminishing one's own power and agency, but this is only a short-term solution. Rather than leading to more power, it only narrows the range of choices for all concerned.

Part of what many hold to be true about American schools in general (and Mr. Stevens could certainly be counted in this group) is that they teach students to think for themselves. This may be true to some extent; however, students also learn they can only do so within set limits. Even if a student were to decide for herself that she is finished with an activity being guided by an authority, she would not be able to openly assert her agency and declare the activity finished in all of the classes we observed; subterfuge would be required to negotiate the outcome. Put otherwise, we as a culture profess to value openness and honesty; we abhor manipulation, subterfuge, and hypocrisy. At the same time, we teach such behavior as one of our most basic deutero-lessons. Being in a position to balance these two apparently conflicting imperatives may be an extremely important skill in attaining competence in this culture. Perhaps that is one of the reasons we teach it so well, and so early.

### CONFLICTING DEUTERO-LESSONS ABOUT COMPETITION AND PLAYING BY THE RULES

One of the children's favorite activities occurs toward the end of the school year when math exercises turn into a game in which tables compete against each other for points. On these occasions, Mr. Stevens may take on the persona of Feather Man, Cowboy Bo, Viking Man, Hassan, or any other number of characters he creates with the aid of a special hat or mask which he dons while the children have their heads down. Once he is in costume, children can look. When Mr. Stevens has adopted one of his personas, he chooses a child from each table to go to the board. The delegated students then compete to see who can get the correct answer to the problem Mr. Stevens puts to them. The children appear to enjoy the game, as is indicated by their cheering and hooting for the representative of their respective tables. The students also squeal and shout as the activity begins, which indicates that, despite the control Mr. Stevens continues to assert in his disguise, a new dynamic between desire and discipline is emerging, one that tolerates, even calls forth, and channels desire and its expression in a new way that feels, by contrast with what came before, more expansive.

All of the persona games begin in the same way. The children are instructed to put their heads down while Mr. Stevens changes into his costume. In addition to providing time for (not much of a) costume change, the act of telling the children

to put their heads down and their doing so also provides the key that frames the activity to follow as make-believe (Goffman, 1974). Putting their heads down is a behavioral sign that a significant structural change in their activities is about to occur. Paradoxically, or perhaps not so paradoxically, the break between work-work and work-play, that is, the shift from a more serious mode of teaching/learning to one that incorporates some degree of play, is bodily inscribed and thus managed through a relatively explicit, if not ritualized, exercise of authority, the initiating command to put heads down and not to look. The degree of effort it takes students to control their desire to look thus reveals the price that is expected for moving into a less structured activity. Once heads are down, Mr. Stevens might don the costume of any of several personas, a fact that both stimulates the children's curiosity and causes them some anxiety. The following excerpt is from the very beginning of one of the persona games.

- (2)
- 01        S:        **heads down samantha**  
 02                ((looks around room))  
 03        **heads down ned, I see your eyes** ((turns back to class and  
 04                opens cabinet door. C2 lifts her  
 05                head, looks back quickly at S., and puts head back down.  
 06                S takes off glasses, places them on top of cabinet, and puts on feather  
 07                mask. He goes to his desk and opens drawer))  
 08        C1:        **I wonder which one**  
 09                ((S. looks in his desk, then removes a large feather from  
 10                his feather mask and looks up sheepishly at camera))  
 11        C3:        **I wonder too**  
 12                ((unintelligible sounds of children talking))  
 13        C2:        **not feather man. I hate feather man (xxx) feather man stickers**  
 14        S:        ((in a loud stage voice)) **Va:::t?=**  
 15                =((children's heads pop up and children begin to scream and squeal))=  
 16                = ((S. tickles C2 under the nose, then begins making a high-pitched  
 17                sound to accompany tickling)) **chi chi chi chi chi chiu** ((children squeal-  
 18                ing and screaming))  
 19        S:        **you hate feather man?** ((resumes tickling C2))  
 20                **gu:::chi=guchi=guchi=guchi=guchi=guchi=gu.** ((S. begins to skip  
 21                away to other side of room with arms down at his sides))  
 22        C2:        **cause you never choose me**  
 23                ((S skips around the room, children shouting, squealing, laughing))  
 24        C4:        ((off camera)) **I hate feather man**  
 25        S:        **feather man only picks people who are ready**

We can observe several things regarding power and authority in this scenario: first, in the transition space between the normal classroom activity and the Feather Man game, we see how one student, C2, is learning to negotiate the demands of desire and discipline; second, in the form of the personae game itself, we see a new social space of power relations emerge with new possibilities for action

and change; finally, we again discover conflicting deutero-lessons arising out of the tension between desire and discipline that structure the student's experience, even though this time they are lessons about learning as competition and learning to play by the rules.

One of the first lessons the children learned in the setting observed is that learning and competition are connected (Hilles, 1996). C2 shows signs of having learned this lesson well, perhaps too well. In line 4, C2 quickly lifts her head and looks back at Mr. Stevens to see if she can get a jump on the other children by finding out which character Mr. Stevens is going to transform himself into. She wants to know "which one" before everyone else, but she doesn't want to be negatively sanctioned. She can only sneak a quick look, however, because children are being censured in lines 01 and 03 for just this very act. C2 has in this way learned the value of being competitive, of being first, but also the value of being (or at least perceived as being) a "good girl," which is also a kind of competition, and another way of being first. At the same time C2 is demonstrating some pluck. She has the courage to buck authority, though only for a moment. Such are the constraints on this particular line of action. She knows that she is running the risk of censure, but she minimizes the risk by being fast and not openly defiant. She takes only a brief look and then puts her head back down before the possibility of getting caught becomes too great.

In these few seconds, C2 demonstrates several of the aspects of institutionalized power that we have been talking about. Her actions are caught between the expected push toward autonomy and the pull of submission. They serve both to individuate her and to integrate her further into her institutional role as a 'student.' They also serve to demonstrate conflicting goals: to be first and yet to follow the rules. She has struck an amazing compromise, in other words, between desire and discipline, competition and accommodation, autonomy and authority. Her behavior also returns us to an effect we observed in scenario (1). It is sneaky. This, we would like to argue, seems to be a frequent and understandable result of conflicting deutero-learning. C2 knows she must be both independent *and* submit to authority. Indeed, when she "desires" to win she merely heeds a call that surrounds all the students, a call that "just happens" to conflict with another institutional imperative, the demand to play by the rules. In short, her desire is both elicited and managed by the activity she is involved in: she sneaks a peak, but only a quick one to avoid getting caught just as the little boy in (1) "becomes tired" rather than simply refusing to continue. Both escape further acts of domination, an institutionalized form of power that limits the choices they are able to see and appreciate. Their strategies are inventive, given the conflicting deutero-lessons they must juggle, but they are also limited and limiting, for themselves and for others.

In line 08, C1 voices what is on the mind of probably all the children in the room. He wonders aloud which of the personas Mr. Stevens will assume. In line 11, another child echoes the same curiosity. In 13, C2 says that she hopes it's "not feather man" and then tells why: "I hate feather man." The point is echoed in line



22, where she explains that she hates Feather Man because he never chooses her to go to the board. She hates Feather Man, but she hates him because she wants to be chosen by him and has not been. She thus aligns herself with the authorized activity and submits to authority. Yet, at the same time, her stance toward Feather Man remains independent, even contentious. We should note the role the context plays in this effort to resolve the tension, however. She hates Feather Man because of the way his actions position her (or don't), and in this one particular instance, she is able to say so with impunity. The persona game makes this possible because it creates a special, carnivalesque environment with complicated social relations and a greater possibility for indirect behavior (cf. Bakhtin, 1984).

Cheating (even if it is just sneaking a peek when heads are supposed to be down) is thus an individuating act that negotiates authority in different ways, depending on how it is done, and is itself the result of having been positioned in certain ways. Both the little boy in (1) and the little girl in (2) have been positioned by the competing "voices" (Foucault, 1972) of inclination and institution in such a way that they must somehow resolve the demands of their conflicting deuteroleasons. They are caught in forms of power played out by and within the framework of institutional roles: the teacher, who has the most obvious, formal resources of power and knowledge, and the student, who, for all intents and purposes, has none.

The persona games give both teacher and student a way to explore different aspects of their institutionalized roles. We observed that during the games students engaged in a broader range of actions than they otherwise did, as did Mr. Stevens, for that matter. The statement "I hate feather man," for instance, signals a significant change in teacher-student relations. (Compare the probable effects of C2 saying, "I hate Mr. Stevens!") Yet, these relations, altered and more flexible as they are, nevertheless remain teacher-student relations, relations of power passing through forms of power. Neither Mr. Stevens nor the children shed their roles, in other words. Nor are they suddenly free from the institutionalized acts of domination that permeate their relations and regularly push them to reproduce or reenact those relations, not for the sake of learning, so much as for the smooth and proper functioning of the school itself. They have, however, changed how they relate to each other by changing how they relate to their roles, in a way that, among other things, permits C2 more latitude for expression; more importantly, this change permits her more latitude to express herself in a way that might have an effect on Mr. Stevens' future behavior. In other words, it allows her to express herself in a way that increases her agency, because her agency, like his, is dependent on him, on the other students, and on how they all co-construct and renegotiate their roles over time.

Recall that Foucault (1982) defines relations of power as ones in which we are sensitive to how our actions position others to act or react in more or less productive ways. What room did C2's (predictable) act of peeking leave C2 and the teacher to act? If she had gotten caught, what room would the teacher's (pre-

dictable, required) re-action to her action have left her to act? When caught in forms of power that operate uncontested, unexpected and unanticipatable actions are precluded; no one, neither the one in authority, nor the one who submits, has the unqualified opportunity to think or behave differently. This dynamic is played out with quite different results, though, in the social space that is cleared by the Feather Man persona game, which to some degree frees both teacher and student, *not from*, but within their respective roles. The Feather Man game also encourages students to expect more from others, to expect, for instance, that they will move beyond the easy bounds of their roles, as, say teachers and students, and thus *can* modify the questionable effects of the other conflicting deuterio-lessons being absorbed.

### PROVIDING CHOICE

Finally, in the last scenario, we see another example of how a teacher's power is manifested as actions taken on others' actions or on a field of possible actions, that is, how it operates within an institutional setting that can move more toward relations of power or more toward forms of power, depending on the quality of the interaction and on the real concern for reciprocity (Shor, 1992; Schilb, 1991). In this case, we observe an action that opens up or keeps open possibilities for a student, allows him to "save face," and thus embodies a thoughtful, responsible way of acting. As is always the case, though, even this action is not without its ambiguities and unpredictable twists and outcomes. As Blumenberg (1984) reminds us about saving face:

To allow someone...to "save face"...coincides to a large extent with the precept, implied in the metaphors of roles, that one should not force the focal person of a transaction intended to bring about a change in that person's behavior to leave the identity of his role... (p. 440)

Allowing someone to save face, in other words, can function as a form of power, by providing an easy way to stay within the bounds of our institutional roles and thus to avoid change. In the scenario we are about to discuss, though, the possibility of saving face seems less to preclude change and more to open up the student's range of possibilities.

Mr. Stevens' ways of dealing with his class frequently include establishing and maintaining, to some degree, what we have been calling, after Foucault, relations or relationships of power, which may be one reason why Mr. Stevens is so effective as a teacher even though his methodology (on a macro level) is quite traditional, reflective as it is of institutional forms of power. On a micro level, he often treats his students as genuine interlocutors: they have the power to affect him, all in a moment, or slowly over time; they make him laugh, and there were a number of ongoing class jokes and routines that Mr. Stevens and the students forged

together. Perhaps one of the most unusual aspects of his relationships with students is that he dealt with them not as one usually interacts with 6-year-olds, but rather with a marked non-accommodative demeanor (Hilles, 1994). He treated them with a respect usually accorded adults, and in the following example, his respect is particularly evident. Mr. Stevens allows a young reader, S1, who can't quite figure out what he is publicly reading, to "get it right," and to save face while doing so. The child cannot process a syntactic construction he has never seen in writing before: the object of a preposition followed by an uninflected verb. He takes two runs at it and continues to be puzzled. Rather than allowing the child to lose face by simply telling him the answer, or by calling on another child to "help" or by problematizing the child's behavior, Mr. Stevens draws attention away from the uncomfortable situation *at the same time* that he tries different strategies, strategies that continue to position the child as competent. The first two strategies, we will see, don't seem to help with the problem, but the third go-around is successful.

(3)

01 S1: **look at that goose? (.) go (.) go?**

02 Mr. S: **why don't you start from look again. start from look again.**

03 S1: **look at that goose. go? ((puzzled)) (2.) its? (4.) ((quietly)) go:?**

04 Mr. S: **its:?**

05 S1: ((mumbles sentence to self quietly)) **fat one**

06 Mr. S: **ok read that one more time, with fee::ling** ((said with humorous stage accent))

07 **lookit=that=goose=GO:::**

08 S1: **look at that goose go**

09 Mr. S: **good.**

10 S1: **its a big one and a fat one too.**

The child appears to be puzzled, which in itself is encouraging, for we often observed other students in similar situations who were embarrassed, terrified, indifferent, or hostile. Mr. Stevens' posture is also encouraging, for he has several responses, all of which position and reposition the child with dignity and face, so that he may continue to engage the problem. Mr. Stevens' first attempt to deal with the child's difficulty in line 02 is to suggest that the child start again, rather than to sanction the child outright. The child's next attempt also meets with frustration. In line 03, he is speaking quietly and still seems to be puzzled. Once again, Mr. Stevens intervenes, but this time with a prompt. In 04, he encourages the child to finish the line, which he probably assumes the child can do. The syntax is familiar, a compound sentence with an adjectival subject complement in each. The child finishes the line, but quietly and hesitantly. He still appears puzzled by the illusive syntax of the problematic sentence.

In his third attempt to help the child, Mr. Stevens tries yet another strategy. He invokes the standing class joke about reading plays "with feeling" because "they are great actors," which always evokes at least a smile and often a giggle

from the class. He then models the sentence for the child, almost, it would appear, as an afterthought. This is the strategy that finally does the trick and allows the child to perform competently and at the same time to save face. Being in a situation that does not further tighten up with each successive effort has given Mr. Stevens more room to maneuver, and more importantly, it allows him to position the child so that he can continue to be a competent member of the group of readers. Allowing a child to save face in western society is an unusual act of respect (cf. Taylor, 1995a; 1995b). Actions and reactions either matter, have an effect and purchase, or they do not. For actions to matter, we are arguing, there must at least be an observable, tangible degree of reciprocity, as well as attention paid to how one's actions position others and increase rather than decrease their future possibilities for action.

## CONCLUSIONS

Foucault argues that agency becomes limited to the extent that we get caught oscillating between being tied to our institutional roles and being tied to our inner, private selves (1982). If C2 in scenario (2) is caught "cheating," she becomes labeled a "cheater" and an institutional apparatus begins to encircle her thereby further formalizing that aspect of her active life. If she is not caught, but the circumstances that elicited the "cheating" behavior persist (are reproduced uncritically), she is then forced back into her private sense of self. She identifies herself with the desires and motivations that led her to "do what she did" (which she may not identify as "cheating" because to do so is to externalize it in institutional terms, that is, to prepare herself for institutionalization as a "cheater" who has not been caught). Her only recourse is to identify with an "inner self" that is not properly expressed by her role as a student, an inner self effectively cut off from the field of action at hand, except, as said, in so far as it can be prepared for some future role, if not as a "cheater," then as someone who "needs counseling or psychiatric help," or, alternatively, as someone "with a promising revolutionary spirit."

The little boy in (1) has already lost much agency as a learner. He has not been caught cheating, necessarily, but has been positioned by the institution as "one of the least proficient students in the class." Not surprisingly, he is also "a trouble-maker and a discipline problem." This is a stock character in any classroom, and, we would argue, the student, the teacher, the principal, the other students, perhaps his parents and friends all work together (under varying interpretations of their actions) to maintain and perpetuate his role as a "not-too-bright discipline problem"; it will soon be a part of his traveling resume. As we have seen, though, one possible way to resist such effects is to strengthen relations of power against forms of power.

The little boy in (3) has by far the most options even though at the macro level this is still quite a traditional interaction. It reproduces institutional roles and



procedures in the most transparent way, in that it is not substantially different from a reading lesson one might have seen in an American classroom 40-45 years ago.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the form of the lesson though, Mr. Stevens maintains a substantial degree of flexibility and is alert to the effects of his actions. He reacts to the child's actions by loosening up their roles, but he does so without isolating the child (by catching him between his role as student and his private, in this case, hesitant, uncertain self). Their relationship takes on a more malleable quality that does not ignore the fact that they are a teacher and student, but that maintains their dignity and possibilities for action. This becomes a positive deuterio-lesson, therefore, within what could have been a very negative one about how to act on others' actions, a lesson that may in time mitigate the stultifying effects of institutional power and the many conflicting deuterio-lessons the child has been learning. It appears, paradoxically, that the less room one leaves others, the more one undermines both their and one's own long term agency and power, since a fully mechanical operation, that is, one with only one option, finally leaves everyone without choices.

It is important to reiterate that one is never truly free of forms of power. We thus are not suggesting that forms of power can (or should) be abandoned, or that relations of power can somehow erase the differences between Mr. Stevens, a European-American, adult, English-speaking male of middle socioeconomic status (SES) and the children, all members of linguistic and ethnic minorities and of low SES. Instead, we are suggesting that in the institutionalized setting of elementary schools, children every day are learning deuterio-lessons regarding power, not all of which are "empowering." At the same time, we are suggesting that they are also learning how to resist, again in more or less productive ways, and, indeed, that their chosen or adopted modes of resistance themselves often become sites of struggle, especially as students invent and reinvent their roles and correlate patterns of resistance, all within an institution that pretends not to tolerate such behavior yet at the same time it incites it, prefers some to others, co-opts it, and searches for ways to redefine and manage it.

There is in this sense a precarious balance within the construction of desire in primary school children that in turn sets up an odd dynamic for the teacher. The teacher is often pulled in two directions: first, toward greater discipline, toward shaping students' behavior by insisting on their attention and deference to authority, the need for structure, rules, etc.; and second, toward the need to deal with the excess of desire that these young people suddenly display and toward the need to respond to it by, for instance, using play or more flexible teaching strategies (such as the persona games) that allow the desire to emerge in new ways that can be productive for the children as students.

The dynamic between desire and discipline always seems to leave us with a more or less limited range of possible strategies: we can enforce discipline and try to repress desire, we can encourage desire and try to minimize discipline (while maintaining some kind and degree of order), we can do both (which as we saw is

most common), or we can continually strive to relate ourselves to one another in ways that keep the desire/discipline distinction suggestively ambiguous. We can oscillate between work and play (classroom and recess), or we can integrate work and play by moving between classroom work that is more disciplined, classroom work that is more playful, play time that is more disciplined, and play time that is less structured. It is less a question of suppressing or eliciting desire, then, than a question of keeping desire on the move.

Elementary school is an early site of secondary socialization and the struggle to develop agency in an institutional setting. It is also the place where we learn early on, not just how to cater to, capitulate to, appease, mollify, etc. authority, but where we also learn that agency and power are the result of resisting the twin forces of individuation and institutionalization: there is no resistant social action without authority, just as there is no authority without resistance. There are only times when the possibilities for resistance or the opportunities to exercise authority stand out in greater or lesser relief. Forms of power melt into relations of power, only to re-form as forms of power again. Desire and discipline emerge as two sides of a long chain of deutero-lessons, with each being incited and managed, each a contested ground, each harboring the potential to reproduce critically institutional formations, and each requiring a structured, structuring social space within institutionally prescribed roles and relations that become, or can become, an opening in which to thrive.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>We would like to thank Betsy Rymes for her very helpful and constructive comments. We would also like to thank Elinor Ochs for her insights and guidance on preliminary versions of this article. The responsibility for any errors, omissions, or misinterpretations, of course, is ours.

<sup>2</sup>We are grateful to an anonymous IAL reviewer for pointing out to us that this is a very traditional recitation lesson and therefor its form is not at all likely to engender relations of power.

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# Pragmatic Issues Related to Reading Comprehension Questions: A Case Study From a Latino Bilingual Classroom

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*This paper addresses some of the challenges which bilingual children transitioning to literacy in English may face when asked to answer reading comprehension questions which involve the interpretation and synthesis of information about story characters' thoughts or feelings. Understanding of a character's perspective may depend on inference, rather than lexical content presented in a text. Alternatively, prompt-questions may be framed such that lexical story content is required in the answer. Such questions involve cognitive/metapragmatic tasks related to linguistic competence in written English, as well as an understanding of the different types of knowledge associated with academic writing.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper explores some of the challenges which bilingual (Latino) children, when transitioning to literacy in English, may face when asked to answer certain types of reading comprehension questions. The types of questions at issue here are those which involve the pragmatic task of objectifying understanding of a story character's thoughts, feelings, or perspective on events within a story world. For example, children are often faced with questions designed to test story comprehension, such as the following: "How do you know (a character) felt (a certain emotion)?" or "Why do you think (a character) wanted or thought ... ?" These types of questions present children with several linguistic and pragmatic challenges related to literacy. For example, such questions may be asking them to draw *inferences* about the epistemic or affective state of a story character, based on clues which are very different from those of spoken language. Alternatively, reading comprehension questions may ask the reader to present evidence drawn from the written text to justify their *own* epistemic state, or to explain "how they know what they know" about a character's thoughts or feelings. These questions not only require children to distinguish their own perspective from that of story characters, but even more basically, to understand that this type of question is asking them for a different type of knowledge than questions which ask them to infer. Finally, reading comprehension questions may ask for the reader's *opinion*, which again involves a different type of knowledge from inference or factual recall. Such questions also require the reader to distinguish their own opinion from that of story characters, which, as the following discussion aims to illustrate, is not always easy for students transitioning into literacy in a second language.

## DATA

Both videotape and written data were collected for this study. The data were collected in one fourth grade bilingual classroom in the Santa Barbara area. Ten children in this classroom were monitored over the course of one school year as they worked on a cooperative reading and writing task (CIRC)<sup>1</sup>. Written data, i.e., the children's answers to their reading questions, were collected in both Spanish and English, but videotape was only collected after the children transitioned to working in English in the middle of the year.

Videotaped data consists of nine hours of small-group interaction. The videotapes represent six different days of classroom interaction, each session lasting approximately an hour and a half. During this time period, the children read a passage from a story in a basal reader, then were given reading comprehension questions<sup>2</sup> and asked to work on them together as a group. Each group consisted of four to six children. The teacher first reviewed the questions with the class as a whole, then gave the children forty-five minutes to an hour to write their answers. During the writing, the teacher circulated as a facilitator, answering questions when called upon.

## METHODOLOGY

The videotapes were reviewed with an interest in locating instances of children's discussion of the task, which were then transcribed, along with the teacher's whole class review of the questions. Analysis of the resulting transcripts was a qualitative one, bringing to bear questions like the following: What questions do the children raise themselves? Do the children have questions about the prompt questions? Do the children's understandings of the prompt questions reflect the teacher's understanding of these same questions? How do the children resolve their questions? What grammatical forms, lexical items, or other linguistic aspects related to perspective or point of view, present difficulties for (or become a subject for discussion among) the children? What types of comprehension questions were the children more likely to ask for help with?

The children's written answers were examined to see how they resolved the questions reflected in the transcripts, as well as to see to what extent different students' answers varied, and whether they used inferencing as a question-answering strategy or quoted text content.

## DISCUSSION

### **Inferencing**

In contrast to spoken language, written text contains far fewer contextualization cues for readers as an audience to draw inferences from (cf. Gumperz, 1982). For example, in a spoken context, listeners have access to

paralinguistic clues such as voice quality, intonation, volume, etc., as well as non-verbal signals such as gestures and facial expression. But in written text, such clues are not always present. As Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz have stated:

The move into literacy requires children to make some basic adjustments to the way they socially attribute meaning to the events and processes of the everyday world in order to be able to loosen their dependence upon contextually specific information and to adopt a decontextualized perspective ... The move into literacy requires children linguistically to change their process of interpretation. (1981, p.99)

Clues in written text which readers may draw upon in making inferences about story characters' epistemic or affective states include dialogue as well as the actions of characters. Each of these types of "clue" constitute a different kind of evidential pathway (Ochs, 1990) from which readers gain knowledge about characters' epistemic or affective states. Other clues may lie in the reading comprehension questions themselves, which may lead or invite readers to make inferences which they might not otherwise have made.

Inferencing from written text, like conversational inferencing, is largely based on social knowledge, or knowledge which the reader brings with them to the reading context. Thus, inferences which readers draw may be very different from those which the designer of the reading comprehension question had in mind. Fillmore (1983) contrasts this type of inferencing, e.g., "interpretations which result from schematizations brought to the text to situate its events in common experience, but which do not follow necessarily from anything the text has provided ... [which are] shaped by the idiosyncratic experiences and imaginings of individual readers" (p. 11) with inferences which are clearly invited by the text.

Kang (1992) discusses how such "uninvited" inferences may be due to cultural differences which "'blind' the reader to meanings the author intended," resulting in "the kinds of interpretations that make teachers sit back and wonder 'How in the world did this reader arrive at this interpretation?'" (p. 96). The following two examples illustrate this type of inferencing, showing how readers' inferences may vary greatly from those of the creators of reading comprehension questions.

### *Uninvited inferencing*

The following reading comprehension questions refer to a story (in Spanish) about a moose who takes a job as a waiter in a restaurant, and manages to elicit compliments for his friend the chef Señor Breton (i.e., that he is "the best cook in the world") from the extremely reticent townspeople, who previously would only say "uh-huh" when asked about the food.

¿ Por qué crees que la gente del pueblo nunca la había dicho al señor Breton que era el mejor cocinero del mundo?

*Why do you think the townspeople had never told Mister Breton that he was the best chef in the world?*

Most of the children answered that the townspeople “didn’t think it was important” or “didn’t want to say anything,” etc., but one child wrote:

La gente le dijo eso porque le tenía miedo al alce.

*The people told him this because they were afraid of the moose.*

The above answer might be construed as “incorrect” by some evaluators in that there was no mention in the story of any of the townspeople being afraid of the moose character. But it is not too difficult to see how a child might draw this inference based on their own personal experience, or interpretation of the picture (of a great big moose) accompanying the text. The next example comes from the same story, and illustrates how another type of “uninvited” inference may be a result of readers’ own personal schematizations about characters’ motivations for acting in certain ways. The relevant text is as follows:

— ¿Han quedado satisfechos?— preguntó.

*“Have you all been satisfied?” he (the moose) asked.*

— Ajá! —dijo la gente del pueblo con las bocas llenas del pan de gengibre.

*“Uh-huh!” said the townspeople with their mouths full of gingerbread.*

— Perdón —dijo el alce—.

*“Pardon?” said the moose.*

— ¿Qué dijeron?

*“What did you say?”*

— Que todo estaba muy rico! —dijeron los del pueblo—. Nunca hemos comido tan bien.

*“That everything was very delicious!” said the townspeople. Never have we eaten so well.*

— Se lo diré al cocinero— contestó el alce.

*“I will tell this to the cook,” answered the moose.*

The question asked “Why did the moose say, ‘Pardon, what did you say?’” Four out of seven children inferred that the moose’s question was due to a somewhat mechanical cause, rather than a reason, i.e., that he couldn’t hear what the townspeople said:

El alce dijo “perdón” porque ellos estaban comiendo con la boca llena.

*The moose said pardon because they were eating with their mouths full.*

Three children attributed the moose’s utterance to a motivated reason, i.e:

El alce quería que le dijieran "está rica".  
*He wanted them to tell him it's delicious.*

As Grice (1957) points out, in real interaction, participants must make decisions about whether their co-participants' utterances and actions are intended for a reason, i.e., to invoke some particular understanding from their audience, or are merely the result of a cause which they had no control over. Reading comprehension questions which ask children to infer why a character thought or felt a certain way also ask children to make these same kinds of decisions, only as readers, or "vicarious participants," rather than actual participants in interaction. However, considering the fact that readers have far fewer contextual clues to base their inferences on (especially in "basal reader" textbooks, which are typically simplified in terms of syntax, plot, character development, etc.) than participants in real life interaction do, it is not surprising that readers' interpretations of a context may vary.

### *Inference based on dialogue*

Inferring character's attitudes from reported speech seems to be one pragmatic task which the children in this study repeatedly had trouble with, as evidenced by the transcripts of their small-group discussions. For example, the following piece of transcript shows a small group working on a question which asks them to infer how a character felt; the question was: "How does Aunt Emma feel when her friends criticize her for having too many cats?" The children must base their inference on dialogue from the text, which stated:

Mr. James looked around. Cats were here, there, everywhere.  
 Look at them," he said. "They are ripping up everything."  
 "I don't care," said Aunt Emma.  
 "Everything is old anyway. I like to see them play. They make me laugh."  
 "You have too many cats," said Miss Wilson. "People are laughing at you."  
 "Oh, shush," said Aunt Emma. "I'm an old lady. I don't care what people say."

The transcript of the children's cooperative group work is as follows:

- C: Bella,  
 .. me ayudas a la dos?  
 help me with number two?
- B: two, ((TEACHER APPROACHES))
- T: que?  
 what?
- C: <X debe ser que me ayude en la dos X>, ((TO TEACHER))  
 you have to help me with number two,  
 que no entiendo,  
 which I don't understand,



no =,  
 que le entiendo la pregunta dos,  
*(it's that) I understand question number two,*  
 y no sé cómo contestarla.  
*and I don't know how to answer it.*

T: <READS How does Aunt Emma feel when her friends criticize her  
 for having too many cats READS> ((T READS QUESTION))  
 what do you think it means?

C: He do not .. ^care?

T: She doesn't care?  
 okay,  
 .. what's an answer?

C: a-

T: Why doesn't she care?

C: becau=se,

J: I know!  
 [she's old].

C: [he likes] cat,  
 and he's all,  
 a^lone,

T: and ^she's all alone.

[aunt is-  
 ^aunt is a ^she.  
 but you have to write that in a complete sentence.]

X: [<P Aunt Emma feels when her friends .. crits.. her .. having too many cats P>],

C: pero no-  
 but-  
 cómo le empiezo maestra?  
*how do I begin it teacher?*

H: complete sentence,  
 you guys,  
 in a complete sentence.

In the above example, the children seem to be having trouble deciding which statement made by Aunt Emma in the text is the appropriate one to include in the answer, i.e., "I don't care," "I'm an old lady," or "I like to see them play," etc. Some of the children inferred a causal relation between the first two statements and wrote "Aunt Emma doesn't care because she is an old lady." This answer may seem to fall under the category of "uninvited inferences," but note that it is a complete sentence, and one which is considerably easier for second-language-learners to process than "Aunt Emma doesn't care when her friends criticize her for having too many cats."

Below is another example in which inference depends on an understanding of reported speech. The children ask the teacher for help, and even the teacher eventually decides that the task is too difficult. The text is from a basal reader version of the book *Amelia Bedelia*. Amelia Bedelia is a kooky lady who always

interprets idioms literally, and an appreciation of the humor in the story depends on inferencing to a great degree. Amelia has been hired by the Rogers family as a maid, and while they are out she wreaks havoc in their house. The relevant text is as follows:

"What's next?" she read, "Pot the window box plants. Put the pots in the parlor." Amelia Bedelia went outside. She counted the plants. Then she went into the kitchen. "My goodness," she said. "I need every pot for this." So she took them all. Amelia Bedelia potted those plants, and she took them inside ... Soon Mr. And Mrs. Rogers came home ... They went into the parlor.

"All my good pots!" said Mrs. Rogers.

"And bad ones too," said Amelia Bedelia.

Mr. Rogers looked at the wood box. He shook his head, but he didn't say a word.

The reading comprehension question was: "Does Amelia Bedelia understand that Mrs. Rogers is upset because there are plants in her kitchen pots?" The answer must be inferred from her reply to Mrs. Rogers, i.e., "And bad ones too"; this time, there is no description of her epistemic state in the content of the text. The following transcript of their collaborative interaction reflects the children's confusion:

- C: number three.  
<R does Amelia Bedelia understand XX- [X- X- R>] —
- A: [  
Bedelia understand that Mrs. [2 Rogers,  
[2 Maestra, ((C RAISES HAND))
- C: me ayuda en la three 2]?  
*Teacher, help me with number three?*
- A: <X is upset because there are plants X> R>? 2]  
...(3)  
<R did Amelia Bedelia understand R>,  
X: ... (2) ^doesn't,  
C: [maestra me ayuda en la three]?  
W: [<R does Amelia Bedelia ] unde=rstand,  
that,  
Mr. Roger is,  
upset because,  
[there are in her kitch-]—
- C: [cómo le empezamos number three]? ((To T))  
*how do we begin number three?*
- T: <R does Amelia Bedelia [2 ^understa=nd 2] that Mrs. Rogers is  
[3 upset 3] because [4 there are ^plants 4] in her .. pots?
- W: [2 ^no= 2]!

- [3 no= 3],  
 [4 I thi=nk 4],  
 I think Amelia Bedelia doesn't understand.
- T: ... why=.
- A: [no ^dice why].  
*it doesn't say why.*
- X: [ XXX]?
- W: ... no dice why.
- T: ... okay,  
 but tell me why.
- A: why.
- X: no se dice.  
*it doesn't say.*
- T: okay remember sh- M—  
 Mrs. Rogers says <Q those are all my good pots Q>!  
 and then what does Amelia Bedelia say?
- J: ... and- and- ^old ones,  
 [too].
- T: [yeah],  
 and your bad ones too,  
 so she doesn't understand,  
 that she's upset 'cause of her good pots,  
 she just thinks she's saying,  
 <Q oh yeah,  
 those are my good pots Q>,  
 not like,  
 <H> <Q LO those are my good ^po=ts LO Q>!  
 so,  
 you could say,  
 um,  
 I think that Amelia Bedelia does ^not understand,  
 or,  
 I ^don't think that Amelia Bedelia understands,  
 ...(1)
- A: <X because X>,  
 X: [understand],  
 T: [Mrs. Rogers],  
 you could just end it after Mrs. Rogers,  
 you don't ^have to gi- give why,  
 there are so many questions,  
 you don't have to give me why. ((T LEAVES))  
 ...(4)

In the above example, the teacher relies on voice quality as a cue to index the two possible interpretations of Mrs. Rogers' affective state: one relatively normal and the other marked by low pitch and exclamatory intonation. Voice quality is one contextualization cue (Gumperz 1992) which speakers rely on in spoken inter-



action in order to infer each other's communicative intent. It is a contextualization cue which readers do not have access to in the above example except in the limited form of the exclamation mark at the end of Mrs. Rogers' utterance "all my good pots!" The teacher in this example begins to try to explain that the character Amelia Bedelia doesn't understand the meaning of Mrs. Rogers' excited voice quality, but apparently she decides not to complicate the issue any further by trying to lexicalize this distinction. She decides to simply accept their inference (that Amelia Bedelia doesn't understand) without any further explanation of how they as readers arrived at this knowledge state, apparently since in this case the evidential pathway (through dialogue) is too difficult to explain.

### ***Inference based on characters' actions***

Another type of evidential pathway which readers may have to base their inferences about characters' epistemic or affective states on is that of the characters' actions, as opposed to dialogue. The following two examples illustrate some of the difficulties which the children in this study had with this type of question.

In the following example, the children first read a story about a boy whose teacher assigned him the task of drawing something which nobody had ever seen before. The relevant text is:

Durante los diez minutos siguientes hizo siete dibujos  
*During the next ten minutes he drew seven more drawings.*

más. No hubo manera de hacer que por lo menos uno pareciera  
*He didn't have a way of making sure that at least one would*

algo jamás visto antes. ... Enojado, Jaime arrugó sus  
*seem like something never seen before ... Angry, Jaime*

dibujos y los hizo una bola. Luego se dirigió a  
*crumpled his drawings into a ball. Then he headed over to*

la Srta. Miranda y le dijo:—Todavía no he terminado los cinco dibujos.  
*Miss Miranda and said to her: "I still haven't finished the five drawings."*

The comprehension question was:

¿Cómo se sintió Jaime cuando terminó los dibujos? ¿Cómo lo sabes?  
*How did Jaime feel when he finished the drawings? How do you know?*

The above is a two-part question. It is asking the reader not only to infer something about a characters' affective state, but to specifically explain the evidential pathway which leads to their own knowledge state (which in this case is based on the character Jaime's action of crumpling his drawings into a ball). Thus, the second part of this question is asking the children to distinguish their own

knowledge state from that of the story character Jaime. Out of five children who answered this question, only one understood what kind of information it was asking for, as she wrote:

Jaime se sintió muy enojado. Yo sé que estaba muy enojado porque hizo las papeles en bala.

*Jaime was very angry. I know that he was very angry because he made his papers into a ball.*

The other four children, however, do not appear to have understood what kind of information the question was asking them for, as they made inferences about why Jaime was angry, but did not explain what cues in the story (i.e., what actions) led them to their own knowledge states. They wrote the following two answers:

Jaime se sintió enojado porque no sabía qué dibujar.

*Jaime felt angry because he didn't know how to draw.*

Jaime se sintió enojado porque no quería que la maestra le dijera eso.

*Jaime felt angry because he didn't want the teacher to tell him (to do) this.*

In the next example, the comprehension question "How do you know that Aunt Emma is not afraid of the noise?" is in reference to a story about a little old lady who hears a noise in her house late at night, and suspecting a burglar, bravely goes downstairs to get one of her cats before calling the police. The teacher goes over the relevant sequence of events in the text with the whole class before assigning them to work collaboratively in small groups:

#### [TEACHER REVIEWS QUESTION WITH THE CLASS]

- T:       okay,  
          who wants to read number two?  
          Renata?
- R:       <R How do you know that Aunt Emma is not afraid of the- R>
- T:       how do you know that she's not afraid of the noise?  
          ... you'll have to look in the book.
- A:       I know why.
- T:       Do you already know?
- X:       No-
- T:       Remember she opened the door=  
          she wasn't afraid of the noise,  
          she opened the door,
- A:       the cats [were <X with her X>.
- T:       [ she walked out],  
          she went with the cats to find the burglar.
- A:       because the cats were with her.
- T:       were ^with her,

a=h,  
that's a good idea-  
Amado says maybe because the cats were with her she wasn't afraid.

[SOME MINUTES LATER, THE CHILDREN ARE WORKING ON THIS QUESTION]

- C: la dos.  
number two.  
<R How do you know that Aunt Emma is not afraid of the noise R>?  
I know that Aunt Emma is not afraid of the-..
- B: ay tú qué escribes en la,  
*ay what did you put for,*
- C: burglar is her X,  
it- wha- a burgla=r,  
or- burg-.. burglar,
- B: yo puse,  
*I put,*  
burglar was in the house of Aunt Emma?
- C: <R how do you know Aunt Emma is not afraid of the noise R>?  
Aunt Emma,
- B: Aunt Emma,  
...<1> Aunt Emma .. is not,  
... afraid,  
... <3> to,  
the noise,  
because,
- A: <R how do you know that Aunt Emma is not afraid of the noise R>?  
Aunt Emma is not afraid of the noise,  
because the cats were with her.
- M: becau=se,  
because her cat was with her.

The answer "Aunt Emma was not afraid because her cats were with her" attributes a perspective to Aunt Emma, but it does not explain how the reader arrived at their own perspective, or what their evidential pathway was, which is what the question "How do you know ..." is really asking for. The because-clause in this example offers a possible cause of Aunt Emma's state of mind, not of the reader's. This type of confusion concerning the interlacing of intersubjectivity in reading comprehension questions which ask about characters' states of mind occurred frequently in the data collected for this study.

### *Inferencing based on "leading" questions*

The above example also illustrates how reading comprehension questions can be "leading," or may force students to draw inferences which they might not otherwise have drawn. For example, regarding the story about Aunt Emma and the burglar, the previous comprehension question asked "What did Aunt Emma

do when she heard the noise?" One child wrote: "Aunt Emma called the police because she was so scared of that noise." Obviously, this child had inferred from the story, perhaps based on her own schematizations about burglars in the house, that Aunt Emma was (and should have been) afraid. But the very next question asked her: "How do you know that Aunt Emma wasn't afraid of the noise?", and in response, she wrote what all the other children wrote, i.e., that Aunt Emma wasn't afraid. The way that the question was framed presents the information that "Aunt Emma wasn't afraid" as presupposed, thus leading students to accept this inference as fact, with no choice but to find some way of rationalizing it in their answer.

### **Objectification of knowledge source**

The last two examples also illustrate how some reading comprehension questions ask students for a specific type of information in addition to simple inference, i.e. "How do you know...?" These questions specifically ask readers to say something about their own knowledge state regarding story characters or other aspects of the text. Students need to understand the difference between questions which ask for their perspective vs. those which ask them about perspectives of story characters. In addition, such questions ask students to objectify their source of knowledge, by identifying what it was in the text which led them to a particular knowledge state.

Reading comprehension questions which ask readers to present evidence for their *own* knowledge state specifically requires an objectification of knowledge source. As Ochs (1990) has discussed, indication of the source, as well as degree of certainty, of knowledge, plays a major role in the activity of academic writing. As Ochs states, context-specific language socialization occurs through participation in context-specific activities, as "children in different communities come to understand what constitutes knowledge, what a person can know and what a person cannot know, what are the legitimate linguistic paths to knowledge, who can travel those paths and who cannot" (1990:300). In terms of Ochs' observations concerning legitimate paths to knowledge, it would seem to be crucial to students' ability to succeed that they be able to distinguish exactly what type of knowledge reading questions are asking for, and to know when inferencing is an appropriate question-answering strategy as well as when it is not.

### **Questions asking for opinion**

Reading comprehension questions may ask readers for their *opinion*, as when modal verbs such as "is supposed to," "can," "must," and "should" index the existence of (or departure from) a normal expectation (Tannen, 1979). Such questions often ask readers to relate their opinion to such social norms or expectations, requesting yet another type of knowledge. Again, readers need to be able to separate their own opinion or perspective from that of the character involved.

In the following example, once again, this proved a confusing task for some

children. In response to the reading question "Do you think Aunt Emma *should* have looked for Baby Bear?" (one of her cats, who was downstairs with the burglar), the children's written answers were the following:

- a. I think Aunt Emma shouldn't get Baby Bear because he was with the burglar.
- b. I think Aunt Emma shouldn't look for her cat because Baby Bear was with the burglar.
- c. I think that Aunt Emma will looked for Baby Bear because she miss one cat.
- d. I think that Aunt Emma is going to look for the baby bear because she likes cats.

The first two answers above reflect an understanding of the frame invoked by the modal verb "should," i.e., that the question is asking for the reader's opinion about Aunt Emma's action in light of an expected norm (e.g., that her actions may have been somewhat foolhardy). The last two answers, however, indicate *Aunt Emma's* perspective on her action, rather than that suggested by the prompt (i.e., of a reader whose expectations may have been violated by her actions). They appear to reflect a misunderstanding of the pragmatic frame created by the modal verb *should*, leading to a confusion concerning the type of knowledge which is being asked for.

## CONCLUSION

In answering reading comprehension questions about characters' states of mind, children are faced with several linguistic and pragmatic challenges. One is that of learning to separate their own perspective and knowledge state from that of the character. Another is that they must learn to distinguish whose perspective the question is asking for. A third is that of understanding what type of information the question is asking for, i.e., whether the question is asking for a specific piece of text content, or for an inference, or for opinion.

Examination of the children's written answers in this study suggests that they do not always recognize what type of information reading comprehension questions are asking for, nor whose perspective or knowledge state they call for. The children's confusion concerning these points is evident in their written Spanish answers as well as their English ones, which seems to indicate that learning to understand these pragmatic issues regarding written language may be a general developmental challenge for children, rather than simply one related to learning a second or other language. However, the fact that children are dealing with these pragmatic and linguistic challenges in a new language undoubtedly compounds the challenge for them, since the semantic and pragmatic implications of verbs like know, think, feel, etc. vary across languages and cultures (Chafe & Nichols, 1986). Children transitioning to literacy in a new language must learn not only the



basic semantic meanings of verbs such as know, believe, realize, etc., but their *metapragmatic* implications as well. As Silverstein (1993) defines the term, "signs functioning metapragmatically have pragmatic phenomena ... as their semiotic objects" (33). In other words, epistemic verbs such as *know*, *believe*, *realize*, etc. also point to, or index, pragmatic information (above and beyond their semantic content), including how they relate to perspective or evidential pathway in written text (i.e., do they index an omniscient author, etc.). In addition, these verbs work to index degree of certainty, or the speaker's perspective in relation to that of the subject of the sentence (Field, in press).

The data in this study suggest that the children involved are developmentally at a point where all of these pragmatic issues related to written text are within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), as their answers vary in appropriateness, or reflect a less-than-fossilized understanding of what the questions are looking for. An understanding of what aspects of a task children find challenging is extremely useful knowledge, both for teachers and for educators involved in creating classroom literacy materials such as reading comprehension questions. Presenting children with appropriately challenging tasks (i.e., with tasks within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1979; Bruner, 1985)) should be a goal of good educational practice; however, an important part of the learning process includes scaffolding on the part of the teacher, at those points where the learner needs help from an expert. Therefore, one suggestion which might be offered based on this study is that it might be useful for teachers to focus on some of the issues raised here, such as what kind of information reading comprehension questions such as "How do you *know* ..." vs. "Why do you *think*...", etc., are asking for, when reviewing questions with students. Another useful practice might be the drawing of inferences concerning characters' states of mind from text dialogue as well as from the physical actions of characters, since students appeared to have particular difficulty with these tasks. Also, discussion about distinguishing the reader's perspective or knowledge state from that of the different characters in the story might be useful as well. All of these pragmatic skills related to written language appear to be ones which fourth-grade children are in the midst of acquiring, thus they would be appropriate points of departure for instruction, or scaffolding, in literacy. As Wood, Bruner, & Ross (1976) initially discussed in their seminal paper on scaffolding, they had in mind the expert helping the child with parts of the task that are at the moment beyond the child's actual level of competence, by supplying the necessary "framework" etc. for the child to build on. Other theorists coming from the perspective of practice theory (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979; Lave & Wenger, 1991) might also suggest that learning, like any social activity, is a negotiated process in which experts (or teachers) stand to learn something as well. This would seem to be particularly true of discussions of inferencing, in which tacit (or less conscious) knowledge becomes the explicit focus of conscious attention. Just as learners stand to benefit from discussion of "how they know what they know," teachers also stand to benefit from talking to their students about their unique perspectives and inferences drawn from texts.

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This research was made possible by grants from the Linguistic Minority Research Center of the University of California and the Spencer Foundation. I would also like to thank Richard Durán and John Gumperz for making their data available to me, as well as Paola Bentivoglio and Jack Du Bois for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The transcription system used is that of Du Bois et al. 1992. See appendix for an explanation of symbols.

## APPENDIX

## Symbols for Discourse Transcription (Du Bois et al. 1992)

Intonation unit	<CR>
Truncation	-
Overlap	[ ]
Subsequent Overlap	[2 2]
Final intonation	.
Continuing intonation	,
Appeal	?
Accent	^
Lengthening	=
Long pause	...( )
Medium pause	...
Short pause	..
Inhalation	(H)
Exhalation	(Hx)
Glottal stop	%
Laughter	@
Laugh quality	<@ @>
Quotation quality	<Q Q>
Reading	<R>
Researcher's Comment	(( ))
Uncertain Hearing	<X X>
Indecipherable syllable	X
Italics	<i>translation</i>

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# Some Problematic "Channels" In the Teaching of Critical Thinking in Current L1 Composition Textbooks: Implications for L2 Student-Writers

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*Advanced writing courses in many freshman composition programs stress the importance of teaching critical thinking skills where students—both L1 and L2—are encouraged to examine and question the social world they inhabit. Derived from an analysis of 12 current freshman composition textbooks, we identify three common “channels” through which student-writers are inducted into the critical thinking practice. These three channels are: (1) using informal logic as a way of developing students’ reasoning strategies, (2) developing and refining students’ problem solving skills, and (3) developing students’ ability to analyze hidden assumptions in ‘everyday arguments.’ This study calls attention to the problematic nature of these “channels” and to some implications of transferring these channels in L2 writing classrooms. We believe that critical thinking is largely a sociocognitive practice that draws significantly on shared cultural practices and norms that mainstream students have (had) access to. ESL student-writers, however, given their diverse sociocultural backgrounds, have not necessarily been socialized in ways that would make induction into critical thinking a (relatively) smooth process (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995). Using critical thinking textbooks (written by and large for L1 students) then, in L2 writing classrooms has complex consequences. Based on our current examination and previous study (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a), we propose a discipline oriented approach to teaching writing, especially for non-native student-writers.*

The plethora of materials—programs, textbooks, appraisal kits—published on critical thinking (CT) over the last decade points partially to how problematic this notion has become in education-related circles. National appraisals on the state of education belittle rote memory and cry out for the inclusion of thinking/reasoning skills in curricula as the fourth ‘R’ (Siegel, 1990). The Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession (1986) and the Holmes group (1986) stress the importance of teaching thinking skills to both students and teachers. The Commission on the Humanities (1980), the College Board (1983) and the National Education Association (Futrell, 1987) similarly promote the incorporation of teaching thinking skills in current curricula; many mainstream universities in the U.S. require their students to take CT courses. Not only does there seem to be much debate over what the phrase means and how to define it (Ennis, 1962; Glaser,

1984; McPeck, 1981, 1990), but also over educational levels at which it should be implemented as well as how it can best be tested and assessed. This paper enters this national debate not to offer one more definition of critical thinking (for definitions and discussions on this concept see Ennis, 1981, 1987; Johnson, 1992; McPeck, 1981; Nelson, 1981; Nickerson, 1984, 1987; Norris, 1985, Paul, 1985), or to suggest ways in which it can be evaluated. Rather we want to examine some aspects of a specific set of textbooks that purport to foster these skills, and to explore some implications of these materials for a specific student population.

The pedagogical artifacts under consideration are 12 current rhetorically oriented L1 freshman composition (FC) textbooks. The readings in these texts are predicated on the popular view that students should be encouraged to examine critically and to question the social world they inhabit (Bizzell, 1992; Shor, 1993). Thus, most of the readings included in these texts revolve around current sociopolitical problems such as animal rights, censorship, or the right to die (see Appendix for a partial selection of topics covered) to encourage students to examine critically certain cultural "givens." Accompanying these readings are rhetorical "channels" or heuristics by which some of these social problems can be addressed. Popular as these textbooks are, both the readings and the channels accompanying them are based on problematic assumptions particularly disadvantageous to L2 student-writers.

The heuristics and readings examined for this study revolve around at least three related channels that these textbooks identify as central to the development of critical thinking/writing skills:

- (1) developing students' sense of informal logic toward strengthening their reasoning strategies,
- (2) developing and refining problem-solving skills,
- (3) developing the ability to look for hidden assumptions and fallacies in arguments.

All three of these features are identified as central features in the five standardized (machine-gradable) English language critical thinking tests (administered to high-school students) currently available on the North American Continent. These tests are:

- The Cornell Critical Thinking Test, Level X (Ennis & Millman, 1985a)
- The Cornell Critical Thinking Test, Level Z (Ennis & Millman, 1985b)
- The New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills (Shipman, 1983)
- The Ross Test of Higher Cognitive Processes (Ross and Ross, 1976)
- The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (Watson & Glaser, 1980)

However, as this paper points out, all three related channels are in themselves problematic, with serious implications when transferred into advanced col-



lege L2 writing classrooms. Even if the points were not problematic and did fully “work,” they draw on shared cultural knowledge that the L2 learner cannot always be assumed to have. L2 composition students, then, are doubly disadvantaged: not only do they have to grapple with U.S.-specific social problems, but, as we will presently point out, they must also grapple with tools that are in themselves problematic. Problems such as the ones presented in this paper as well as those discussed elsewhere (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a; 1996b) lead us to question whether the teaching of advanced writing might be more effective—for both L1 and L2 student-writers—if it were taught within more situated contexts (Brown et al., 1989; Collins, 1991) such as specific disciplines. Most undergraduates in four-year colleges are required to take two semesters of composition. Having both native and non-native students take their advanced composition course (not necessarily in the second semester) in the discipline in which they are planning to major might help alleviate some previously identified problems (Ramanathan and Kaplan, 1996a; 1996b). Anchoring writing in a discipline will provide students with a disciplinary context (Bizzell, 1992; Brannon, 1995; Petraglia, 1995; Swales, 1990; Young, 1994) within which to gauge what constitutes problematic issues; it will also give them a clearer sense of discipline-specific rhetorical tools with which to address those issues.

### **CRITICAL THINKING AND FRESHMAN COMPOSITION TEXTBOOKS: HOW WE GOT HERE**

To provide at least a partial backdrop against which to place CT in Freshman composition (FC), the first half of this section will be devoted to partially reconstructing the background from which this concept emerged; the second half will briefly address CT as a sociocognitive practice. Section 2 will be devoted to discussing the problematic nature of the three common features that all of the examined composition texts identify as central to critical thinking. Where relevant, this section will also discuss the implications of these assumptions for non-native student-writers.

According to Kennedy et al. (1991), part of the critical thinking debate focuses on whether critical thinking is the same across disciplines or whether all critical thinking abilities are specific to disciplines. At one end of the spectrum are thinkers like Glaser (1984) and McPeck (1981) who uphold a subject-specific view of critical thinking; Project IMPACT (Winocur, 1985) in California is, for instance, an attempt at integrating thinking instruction into content areas of Math, reading, and language arts at the middle school and high school levels (cf. Kennedy et al., 1991). At the other extreme are proponents who advocate instrumental enrichment (Fuerstein et al., 1985), “lateral thinking” (deBono, 1983) and “structure of the intellect” (Meeker, 1969) (cited in Kennedy et al., 1991). These experts advocate separate thinking courses and programs such as Philosophy for Children (Lipman, 1982). Ennis (1985) and Sternberg (1987) point out that each approach has its

advantages and have put forward a "mixed model" (Sternberg, 1987, p. 225) that integrates elements of each.

Current L1 composition textbooks appear to fall toward that end of the spectrum that advocates separate, discipline-free thinking skills. The nature of topics covered in current rhetoric-oriented FC texts (see Appendix 1 for a partial list) seems to reflect strong ties to a currently fashionable movement in education, namely "critical/radical pedagogy" (Shor, 1993; Shor & Freire, 1987). Much of this movement is centered around the idea that schools should serve as "sites for learning about the principles of critical literacy and democracy," since such education would promote the development of "critical citizenship, civic courage, and . . . organic intellectuals" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 216). This movement aims to achieve its ideals by stressing forms of learning and knowledge that will provide a critical understanding of how social reality works, on how certain "disparities between democratic principles and undemocratic realities" (Benesch, 1993, p. 546) are sustained and reinforced, and of how those aspects related to the logic of domination can be changed (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 216).

The above pedagogy follows closely on the heels of "liberal humanism," a movement in the 1960's that stressed the importance of empowering students and parents, and of connecting school to students' real lives. This movement—frequently associated with John Dewey—emerged primarily as a response to a conservative demand that schools offer more rigorous courses in Math and Science—a notion in keeping with the idea that mastery of techniques is equivalent to a "full education." For Dewey, the point of education was not so much to prepare students for jobs or skills but rather for the broad requirements of citizenship in a democratic society. Dewey also claimed that it was crucial for every child to participate in the learning experience as opposed to being a passive object of education, a point that was later echoed—albeit more vociferously—by radical pedagogy, Freire (for a comprehensive history of composition see Berlin, 1987).

Radical pedagogues adopted and extended yet another view of Dewey's: The idea that "knowledge is a perception of those connections of an object which determine its applicability in a given situation" (Dewey, 1966, p. 200). In other words, it was important for schools to teach students to apply their learning in the real world. Self-knowledge, Dewey felt, was the key to one's knowledge of the world, and specifically to the ability to connect contemporary experience to received information. This view—that schools devise curricula around "information" and the real world—informs both current views about critical thinking in general and FC texts in particular.

While Dewey's movement became very popular, it failed to become completely integrated into school ideology; instead, it was appropriated "piecemeal into a hybrid discourse" of liberal reform which has dominated U.S. schools since the turn of the century (Aronowitz & Giroux 1985, p. 7). Radical pedagogues felt that "although he [Dewey] had a clear idea of what schools *ought to be*, he carefully avoids making a social and political analysis of what schools actually *are*"

(Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 9). Likewise, Gramsci (1971), the noted Italian Marxist, did not address what schools actually do; instead, his views primarily focused around developing a school form that would enable subaltern children not only to gain access to the "dominant Discourse" (Gee, 1991), but to relate it critically to dimensions of their own histories, experiences, and cultures. Paulo Freire, on the other hand, did address social and political inequalities that school structures perpetuated (1977; 1985). Like Dewey and Gramsci, he stressed the importance of validating oppressed voices (in his case Brazilian peasants) by connecting the individual to historical and contemporary circumstances. Education had to have the practical outcome of transforming society to meet the collective needs of individuals; it became for him the "central terrain where power and politics operate out of a dialectical relation between individuals and groups who live out their lives with specific historical conditions and structural constraints. . . ." (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 12).

Many freshman composition programs aiming to develop "critical thinking" skills can be located against this partial background. Bizzell, a central figure in L1 composition theory, for instance, openly acknowledged her affiliations to Freire in her work (1992). Like Freire, she hoped to foster "critical consciousness" through literacy schooling, which in turn could be turned on inequities in the larger social order.<sup>1</sup> However, she has since questioned the causal relation between critical consciousness and academic thinking and has, in fact, gone on record rejecting the imposition of academic discourse on all students at all costs (1993), a point very much in keeping with the overall stance adopted in this paper. Other factors that have contributed to sensitizing students in writing courses to their "political responsibilities whether as leaders or simply as active participants" (Berlin, 1987, p. 189) have been the contributions of rhetoricians from a variety of fields, including poststructuralist literary and cultural criticism (Barthes, 1988; Eagleton, 1988; Jameson, 1984; Lentricchia & McLaughlin, 1987; Said, 1988) and philosophical pragmatism (Rorty, 1995). Rhetoricians operating in this mode have tended to "move in the direction of the epistemic, regarding rhetoric principally as a *method of discovering*, and even *creating knowledge*, frequently within socially defined discourse communities" (our emphasis, Berlin, 1987, p. 183).

The idea of "creating knowledge" appears to crucially inform the readings in the textbooks under investigation. Even a cursory examination of topics covered in several current L1 composition texts (see Appendix for a partial list) points to the seriousness with which these texts view the importance of creating learners' knowledge by sensitizing them to contemporary "public issues" and the importance of enabling writers to "take a stand" on an issue (*Writing Arguments*, 1995, p. iv). The texts are designed as aids to "writing thoughtful, effective arguments on important political, social and scientific ethical and religious issues" (*Current Issues and Enduring Questions*, (hereafter CIEQ, 1993, p. iv). Likewise, an examination of the rhetoric sections of these books reveals an emphasis which regards rhetoric as a "method of discovering" through the development of "respectable

techniques" (as opposed to "gimmicks," *CIEQ* 1993, p. iv ) by which to target these public issues. Thus, both the readings and the rhetoric accompanying them point to the importance laid on teaching student-writers "a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering and making sense of it" (Berlin, 1982, p. 777). But as we, along with others, have pointed out (Atkinson, to appear; Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Bizzell, 1993; Delpit, 1988; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1995a, b), and will presently demonstrate as well, this idea of imposing on all students one way of ordering or making sense of the world is problematic.

### **CRITICAL THINKING AS A SOCIOCOGNITIVE PRACTICE: LOCATING L2 STUDENT-WRITERS**

The emphasis placed on developing "thinking" skills across various levels of educational curricula (Ennis, 1962, 1987; Norris, 1985; Walton, 1993) seems to reflect a general view that this practice is largely cognitive. However, much research in situated cognition (Brown et al., 1989; Lave, 1988; Resnick, 1990) challenges this idea that the social and the cognitive can be studied independently, "arguing that the social context in which cognitive activity takes place is an integral part of that activity, not just the surrounding context for it" (Resnick, 1990, p. 4). As Lave argues (1988), our definition of the cognitive is influenced by assumptions that derive from social and economic arrangements with long historical roots (Goody, 1989).

From this point of view, critical thinking is not only a cognitive practice, but a sociocognitive one whose detailed workings are hidden from our view because it has become a practice that we take for granted. This practice—as is any practice, as Vygotsky's writings testify—is mediated on both social and individual planes by "tools" and "signs" (Vygotsky, 1981; Vygotsky & Luria, 1930; Wertsch, 1991) that reinforce and sustain it. Two critical corollary points regarding such signs must be taken into account when attempting to understand Vygotsky's explanation of human mental functioning. The first is that "[by] their nature, signs [tools] are social, not organic or individual" (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 137), and that they are products of sociocultural evolution and hence are inherently positioned in sociocultural contexts. They are not invented by the individual nor discovered in the individual's independent interaction with nature, and they are not inherited in the form of innate predispositions (Wertsch, 1991, p. 92); instead, individuals, by being part of a sociocultural milieu, appropriate these mediational tools (Leont'ev, 1959). Mental functioning—or, in the present case, the ability to think in particular ways—can be seen to be rooted as much, if not more, in social contexts than in the individual. The second relevant Vygotskian point is that "[by] being included in the process of behavior, the . . . tool [the textbooks] alters the entire flow and structure of mental functions" (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 137). In other words, the tools aid in transformations—including social and cognitive—that occur when the learner is being inducted into the practice.



These points have important implications for the present discussion: Given that “tools” in themselves are sociocultural in nature, and given that they mediate between the social practice and learner, it would follow that people of shared sociocultural backgrounds would have a relatively easier time accessing and/or dealing with those “tools.” Ethnographic research on literacy practices has shown us that middle-class socialization practices such as reading bedtime stories at home (Heath, 1983) or participating in “show and tell” in school (Michaels, 1981) ultimately prepare the child for essayist/school-based literacy. In the light of the present discussion, L1 students who have been socialized in mainstream ways of using language (cf. Gee, 1991) have an easier time in composition classes where CT skills are fostered because so much of the CT practice draws on shared cultural knowledge and values (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995). Thus, although the “channels” adopted by these “tools” are problematic, L1 students are better prepared to handle them than L2 students.

Induction into the CT practice for L2 student-writers, on the other hand, is that much more difficult given that they are socialized in their respective, culturally valued practices (Connor & Kaplan, 1987). They often come to the writing task having been socialized into “analyzing” “problems,” with particular “reasoning” strategies (features associated with the CT practice that will be discussed in more detail presently) that are not only acceptable by their respective cultures, but in ways that are compatible with the linguistic means provided by their languages (Berman & Slobin, 1994). Kellerman (1995, p. 138-139), citing Berman and Slobin’s evidence, presents four versions of the same event interpreted in four different languages to illustrate the point that the resources available to speakers of different languages prompt somewhat different presentations of the event:

Below is a (slightly abbreviated) cross-language example showing how different languages “filter” the way in which events are related. It comes from transcripts of children with different native languages relating the “Frog Story” from a set of pictures without words (Berman & Slobin, 1994, p. 11). All of the children in these examples (their age in parentheses) are native speakers of the respective languages:

English

*And he starts running. And he tips him off over a cliff into the water. And he lands (9; 11).*

German

*Der Hirsch nahm den Jungen auf sein Geweih und schmiß ihm den Abhang hinunter genau ins Wasser.*

[The deer took the boy on his antlers and hurled him down from the cliff right into the water.] (9; 11)

Spanish

*El ciervo le llevó hasta un sitio, donde debajo había un río.*

*Entonces el ciervo tiro perro y al niño al río. Y después, cayeron.*

[The deer took him until a place, where below there was a river. Then the deer threw the dog and the boy to the river. And then they fell.]



Hebrew:

*Ve ha'ayil nivhal, ve hu hitxil laruts. Ve hakelets rats axarav, ve hu higia lemacok she mitaxat haya bitsa, ve hu atsar, ve hayeled ve hakelev naflu labitsa beyaxad.*

[And the deer was startled, and he began to run. And the dog ran after him, and he reached the cliff that had a swamp underneath, and he stopped, and the boy and the dog fell into the swamp together.] (9; 7)

Berman and Slobin claim that the differences between these excerpts is to some extent determined by the linguistic possibilities inherent in each of the languages. The first two, in English and German, describe the complexity of the fall via a series of adverbial particles and prepositional phrases (*tips off, over a cliff, into the water, schmiß, den Abhang\_hinunter, ins Wasser*). The verbs *tip* and *schmeißen* [hurl] signify the manner in which the deer causes the fall. The Spanish and Hebrew versions resemble each other but differ from the English and German versions. In the former pair, the event is recounted as a series of episodes. First there is a description of location (cliff with river below, place with swamp underneath); then the deer acts and, as a result, the boy and the dog fall. Berman and Slobin (1994, p. 12) point out that the verbs chosen (*throw, fall, stop*) are “bare descriptions of change of state, with no elaboration of manner.” Furthermore:

These are not random differences between the narrative styles of these . . . children, but rather show their abilities to convey just those analyses of the event that are most compatible with the linguistic means provided by their languages. English and German provide large sets of locative particles that can be combined with verbs of manner, thereby predisposing speakers toward a dense style of encoding motion events. On the other hand, a different style arises in the other . . . languages, which rely more on simple change-of-state and change-of-location verbs, thereby predisposing speakers towards more extended analyses of motion events (Berman & Slobin, 1994, p. 12).

Thus, the order and manner of presentation (including addressing a problem as well as analyzing and reasoning through it) appear to be culture-specific, conditioned in part by the linguistic resources available but also by customary modes of perception. L2 student-writers, given their respective sociocultural and linguistic socialization practices, are more likely than native English speaking (NES) students to encounter difficulty when being inducted into CT courses in freshman composition classes; they are not “ready” for CT courses in either L1 or L2 writing classrooms.

### THREE PROBLEMATIC CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH CRITICAL THINKING IS FOSTERED

Twelve argumentation-oriented L1 freshman composition textbooks were examined for the purposes of this paper. To ensure that our conclusions are based

on recent textbooks, we randomly selected those argumentation textbooks whose dates of publication fell within the last six years (1989-1995). Five of these texts are in at least their second editions. Our analysis consisted of identifying those channels that all twelve texts emphasized as crucial to CT.

### **Channel #1—Developing reasoning skills through informal logic models: How general or specific a skill is CT?**

Before considering whether reasoning skills can in fact be encouraged through the teaching of informal logic, it might be fruitful to consider whether they constitute some kind of general ability (with “general” benefits) or whether they point to a specific skill (McPeck, 1991). This distinction is important because if we had some sort of mutually agreed upon idea as to the kind of competence reasoning skills are, then we would be in a better position to articulate ways of teaching it and testing for it. The existence of a clear universally accepted definition would make it possible and realistic to determine what courses taught at what point in the curriculum could promote CT skills.

An analysis of our data reveals that rhetoric-oriented freshman composition textbooks present reasoning skills as at once a “general ability” leading to particular general benefits as well as a “specific skill,” a feature that only problematizes issues regarding whether and how they are to be taught and tested. Reasoning skills are presented as a general ability in that they are predicated on the idea that they lead to liberal critical thinking (Cederblom & Paulsen, 1987; Johnson, 1992); they are presented as specific in that they are seen to consist of teaching a relatively small number of specific skills (Kahane, 1976; Walton, 1993) that “once mastered enable one to deploy these skills across any problems, arguments or questions where critical thinking might be called for” (McPeck, 1990, p. 24). Thus, for instance *Writing Arguments* (1995) sees the function of argument as the general ability to

think through the complexity of an issue and seek truth . . . . The writer, confident in the truth and rightness of his or her claim, concentrates on swaying an audience. . . . [T]he value of referential or truth seeking argument lies in its power to deepen and complicate our understanding of the world. . . . The value of an argument with a persuasive aim is its ability to help social groups make decisions in a rational and humane way (p.5).

*Elements of Argument* adopts a similarly general stance by maintaining that argumentation can help “cope with the bewildering confusion of voices in the world. . . . It can give you tools for distinguishing between what is true and what is false, what is valid and what is invalid” (1994, p. 7). Argumentation, for this text, is seen to have a political benefit as well: “democracy depends on a citizenry that can reason for themselves, on men who know whether a case has been proved, or at least made probable” (p. 7). Argumentation is seen as a “civilizing influence,” “the very basis for democratic order.” “In free societies, argument and de-

bate remain the preeminent means of arriving at consensus" as opposed to totalitarian countries where coercion may "express itself in a number of reprehensible forms—censorship, imprisonment, exile, torture, or execution" (p. 8).

All of the texts examined for this study articulate, albeit in varied ways, similar stances regarding the general benefits of critical thinking. That these texts are also simultaneously specific is partially evident in their emphasis on specific rhetorical tools, especially those oriented around "soft" logic (Scriven, 1980; Walton, 1993), as means to target some of the general aims mentioned above. Thus, Scriven's idea (1980, 1992) that "the goal of soft logic is internalizing the skills of reasoning" (1980, p. 159) appears to be echoed in various ways in all of the examined texts: All emphasized in varying degrees aspects of "informal logic" considered crucial to effective and "sound" reasoning. *Writing Arguments* (1995), for instance, devotes a part of its section on Aristotelian logic to explaining the importance of assessing enthymemes in arguments. An *enthymeme* is defined as "an incomplete logical structure that depends, for its completeness, on one or more unstated assumptions (values, beliefs, principles) that serve as the starting point of the argument" (p. 105). In their summarization of the enthymeme section, the editors lay out the following three points and an illustration supporting these points:

1. Claims are supported with reasons. You can usually state a reason as a because clause attached to a claim (see Chapter 4).

2. A because clause attached to a claim is an incomplete logical structure called an enthymeme. To create a complete logical structure from an enthymeme, the unstated assumption (or assumptions) must be articulated.

3. To serve as an effective starting point for the argument, this unstated assumption should be a belief, value, or principle that the audience grants. Let's illustrate this structure by putting the previous example—plus two new ones—into schematic form. . . .

INITIAL ENTHYMEME: Cocaine and heroin should be legalized because legalization would eliminate the black market in drugs.

CLAIM: Cocaine and heroin should be legalized.

STATED REASON: because legalization would eliminate the black market in drugs.

UNSTATED ASSUMPTION: An action that eliminates the black market in drugs is good. (Or, to state the assumption more fully, the benefits to society of eliminating the black market in drugs outweigh the negative effects to society of legalizing drugs) (p. 100-101).

The above steps are presented as ways by which to arrive at unstated assumptions that one's audience will (or will not) accept, since audience-acceptance at least partially influences whether or not the writer has grounds from which to begin building an effective argument (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a). The successful and logical arguer, said Aristotle, is the person who knows how to formulate and develop enthymemes so that the argument hooks into the audience's values and beliefs (*Writing Arguments*, p. 100).

Similar to *Writing Arguments*' discussion of enthymemes is the section on warrants in *Elements of Argument*. Adopting the "Toulmin model," *Elements of Argument* (1994) posits the importance of warrants as effective strategies by which to ensure a "sound," logical relationship between a "claim" and "support" (pp. 9-11). "A warrant is an inference or an assumption. . . a guarantee of reliability" (p. 11). The following segment drawn from *Elements of Argument* stresses the importance that this text (along with 10 of the 12 examined) places on establishing what one's given audience would consider "logical connections" between one's claim and support:

CLAIM: Laws making marijuana illegal should be repealed.

SUPPORT: People should have the right to use any substance they wish.

WARRANT: No laws should prevent citizens from exercising their rights.

Support for repeal of the marijuana laws often consists of medical evidence that marijuana is harmless. Here, however, the arguer contends that an important ethical principle is at work: Nothing should prevent people from exercising their rights, including the right to use any substance, no matter how harmful. Let us suppose that the reader agrees with the supporting statement, that individuals should have the right to use any substance, no matter how harmful. But in order to accept the claim, the reader must also agree with the principle expressed in the warrant, that government should not interfere with the individual's right. He or she can then agree that laws making marijuana illegal should be repealed. *Notice that this warrant, like all warrants, certifies that the relationship between the support and the claim is sound (Elements of Argument, p.12, emphasis added).*

Warrants, then, serve as bridges between claims and supports, as warranties that encourage skeptical audiences to be receptive to particular arguments (*Writing Arguments* 1995, p. 102). In many ways they are not that different from "unstated assumptions" (of the kind presented earlier) in that they too are underlying beliefs that link our claims to our audience's beliefs.

A problem with models like these (though they are no doubt useful in creating successful arguments) is that there appears to be much variation between textbooks as to which particular model (or set of models) actually fosters critical thinking skills. *Elements of Argument* tends to stress the Toulmin model (partially illustrated by the above excerpt) whereas *Writing Arguments* presents its discussion of enthymemes along with discussions on Aristotelian logic and the "stasis system" (Fahnestock & Secor, 1991) as necessary channels through which to effect "sound" reasoning. Also related to the specific nature of these texts (but not particularly related to the point about informal logic) is the fact that there appears to be little agreement between these textbooks as to *which* specific skills comprise critical thinking. Each of the textbooks examined for this study (to say nothing of the different programs/tests/kits across the country) lay differing emphases on different skills. Thus, for instance, *Writing Arguments* partially emphasizes the ability to detect *logical fallacies*, while *The Informed Argument* partially stresses the impor-



tance of *getting to know one's audience*. In the same vein *Current Issues and Enduring Questions* partially stresses the difference between *reason and rationalization*, while *Contexts and Communities* highlights *critical reading strategies*. Arriving, thus, at a finite set of critical thinking skills about which there is complete mutual consensus—a feature that would facilitate its teaching and testing—when there is so much variation seems, at least for the moment, improbable. Furthermore, while the italicized phrases, above, are presented as “specific skills” that contribute to critical thinking, one could, in fact, argue that they are large bundles of different kinds of skills that need to be taught and learned in more situated contexts such as particular disciplines (Freedman, 1995; Resnick, 1990; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a; 1996b).

Thus, the simultaneously general and specific nature of these L1 textbooks renders these pedagogical artifacts problematic. There seems to be an incongruence in the idea of exposing students to particular informal logic models in order to produce an “informed citizenry”: the (overly) specific means do not exactly fit with the (broad) general ends. When such incongruent means-ends are transferred to L2 writing sections, the consequences are much more complex. Non-native speakers of English, whatever their technical visa status, do not necessarily come equipped with assumptions about democracy or with a general desire to be an “informed citizen” of the United States; as pointed out earlier, they may also be accustomed to using a different (“soft”) logical system, one which differs substantially from English in the frequency, distribution and function of grammatical structures depending on what is or is not permissible in their respective native linguistic system. We saw in section 1b that the large sets of available locative particles in English and German may partially account for the increased use of location descriptors by (native) speakers of these languages; spoken discourse in Spanish and Hebrew, on the other hand, does not offer as many locative particles (Berman & Slobin, 1994). L2 student-writers, then, expected to structure their information in ways that meet discourse-expectations of English speaking audiences (Ramanathan-Abbott, 1993) can find themselves doubly disadvantaged: They are not likely to have been socialized into middle-class literacy practices that would facilitate mastery over these models, and they are more likely to have been socialized into other linguistic systems that employ different logics to address problems and the structuring of information.

### **Channel #2: Encouraging reasoning/critical thinking skills by developing and refining students' problem-solving skills**

Critical thinking experts such as Ennis (1962; 1987), Kahane (1976), and Johnson (1992) seem, on the whole, to collapse notions of “reasoning ability” and “everyday problems” to “argument analysis.” “More often than not they go on to collapse these distinctions by simply talking about ‘everyday reasoning’—a phrase which has a nice ring about it, if for no other reason than it suggests something which is clear and understood by everybody” (McPeck, 1990, p. 1). Scriven (1980;



1992) maintains that training in critical thinking should include highly controversial issues of considerable personal, social, or intellectual importance that are not seriously addressed in the regular curriculum. Arguments, as presented in the texts examined for this study, appear to reflect this view: The subject matter of most of them subsumes “everyday” matters of public controversy or social problems that concentrate on current sociopolitical issues such as nuclear armaments, the right to die, gays in the military, gun control, animal experimentation, illegal immigration, affirmative action, women’s rights, to name a few. (For a partial list of public issues covered by the texts, see Appendix). Reflection on and exploration of such “everyday” arguments is regarded as healthy and desirable because the “argumentative process . . . is indispensable to the preservation of a free society” (*Elements of Argument*, 1994, p. 5). Such a view is justified on at least the following points: (1) the survival of a democracy depends partially on public debate about such issues (Cederblom & Paulsen, 1987); (2) public education in North America would like to prepare people to make decisions about such issues, and (3) these are areas around which honest disagreement is possible (McPeck, 1990).

The following cases that the introductory chapter of *Writing Arguments* has students consider illustrate the sociopolitical nature of some of these problems:

#### CASE ONE ILLINOIS COURT WON’T HEAR CASE OF MOM WHO REFUSES SURGERY

CHICAGO—A complex legal battle over a Chicago woman’s refusal to undergo a caesarean section, even though it could save the life of her unborn child, essentially was settled yesterday when the state’s highest court refused to hear the case.

The court declined to review a lower court’s ruling that the woman should not be forced to submit to surgery in a case that pitted the rights of the woman, referred to in court as “Mother Doe,” against those of her fetus.

The 22-year-old Chicago woman, now in the 37th week of her pregnancy, refused her doctor’s advice to have the surgery because she believes God intended her to deliver the child naturally.

The woman’s attorneys argued that the operation would violate her constitutional rights and the free operation of her religious beliefs.

Cook County Public Guardian Patrick Murphy, the court-appointed representative of the woman’s fetus, said he would petition with the Supreme Court asking it to hear the case. He has 90 days to file the petition, but he acknowledged future action would probably come too late.

Doctors say the fetus is not receiving enough oxygen from the placenta and will either die or be retarded unless it is delivered by cesarean section. Despite that diagnosis, the mother has stressed her faith in God’s healing powers and refused doctor’s advice to submit to the operation (1995, p. 11-12).

## CASE TWO

## HOMELESS HIT THE STREETS TO PROTEST PROPOSED BAN

SEATTLE— The homeless stood up for themselves by sitting down in a peaceful but vocal protest yesterday in Seattle's University District.

About 50 people met at noon to criticize a proposed set of city ordinances that would ban panhandlers from sitting on sidewalks, put them in jail for repeatedly urinating in public, and crack down on "intimidating" street behavior.

"Sitting is not a crime," read poster boards that feature mug shots of Seattle City Attorney Mark Sidran, who is pushing for the new laws. . . . "This is city property; the police want to tell us that we can't sit here," yelled one man named R.C. as he sat cross-legged outside a pizza establishment.

Marsha Shaiman stood outside the University Book Store holding a poster and waving it at passing cars. She is not homeless, but was one of many activists in the crowd. "I qualify as a privileged white yuppie," she said. "I am offended that the privileged people in this country are pointing at the poor, and people of color, and say they are causing problems. They are being used as scapegoats."

Many local merchants support the ban saying that panhandlers hurt business by intimidating shoppers and fouling the area with the odor of urine, vomited wine, and sometimes even feces (1995, p. 13).

The justification for presenting cases/problems such as these is to induce students "to see argument first as a process of truth-seeking and clarification and then later, when you are firmly committed to a position, as an occasion for persuasion" (*Writing Arguments*, 1995, p. 22). The textbook advises students to seek out a wide range of views, to welcome views different from their own, to treat these views respectfully, and to see them as intelligent and rationally defensible. The skills of reason and inquiry developed through the writing of arguments is meant to help students become more "objective," thereby enabling them to present "sound" arguments.

While these are undoubtedly laudable goals, there are at least two problems. In all of the texts examined, social problems like the above are presented with "pro" and "con" readings that are intended to provide students with different viewpoints on the problem in question so as to enable them to take a more "informed" stand. However, having students "take a stand" and make "sound" judgments after assigning them 3 or 4 "pro" and "con" readings on California's proposition 187 or affirmative action does not enable them to deal with the issue in its complexities at all; if anything, it takes away from the enormous complexities built into issues such as these, turning real problems into pseudo problems with easy solutions. A second problem with this channel has to do with the fact that informal logic tools of the kind discussed earlier are used to perform "sound" analyses on such "everyday" social problems. Like McPeck (1990), we contend that the real difficulty with "everyday" social problems has little to do with establishing soundness and almost everything to do with understanding and assimilating complex informa-

tion. One can pick virtually any “everyday problem” and find oneself sinking into a quagmire of arguments and counter arguments. For example, the issue of gays in the military opens up, among others, questions about religious/“moral” attitudes toward homosexuality, about judging military ability on the basis of sexual preference, about being public or not about one’s sexual identity, about equal rights, and even about the possibility of women serving in the military. Making a truly “sound” decision (if there is anything like a “sound” decision) about these kinds of issues would mean having access to a lot of information. In the end, whatever stand we take is tenuous since there are few simple and straightforward decisions in matters such as these, a point that is conceded by at least 5 of the examined texts. However, students would need much more than 3 or 4 readings to make any kind of “informed” judgment. As for L2 student-writers, given that they have not necessarily been socialized in this culture, they may not perceive alleged “problems” as problems at all, or even as matters of particular interest. We have argued elsewhere (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a) that, for example, a topic such as gun control may not be seen as a “problem” by individuals from other cultures in which guns are prohibited entirely, and that individuals from other cultures may not understand the implied constitutional right to bear arms that, among other issues, underlies the gun control debate in the United States

### **Channel #3. Developing the ability to look for hidden assumptions and fallacies in everyday arguments**

This point integrates parts of point one (the use of informal logic tools) and point two (namely everyday arguments) to address the importance of looking for logical fallacies and hidden assumptions. All of the textbooks stress the ability to discern logical flaws in one’s own and others’ argumentation process as crucial to the development of critical reading/writing skills. *The Informed Argument* (1989), for instance, lists fourteen common fallacies of which the *ad hominem* argument, *ad misericordiam* argument, *ad populum* argument, slippery slope, and straw man are a few (p. 29-35). The following excerpts illustrate the texts explanation of two of these terms:

**Slippery slope** According to this fallacy, one step will inevitably lead to an undesirable second step. An example would be claiming that legalized abortion will lead to euthanasia or that censoring pornography will lead to the end of the freedom of the press. Although it is important to consider the probable effects of any step that is being debated, it is fallacious to claim that men and women will necessarily tumble downhill as a result of any one step. There is always the possibility that we’ll be able to keep our feet on the ground even though we’ve moved them from where they used to be (p.34).

**Ad Misericordiam Argument** An *ad misericordiam* argument is an appeal to pity. . . . When the appeal to pity stands alone, even in charitable appeals where its use is fundamental, the result is often questionable. On my way to

work this semester, I have been driving past a large billboard advertising for the American Red Cross. It features a closeup photograph of a distraught (but nevertheless good-looking) man, beneath which in large letters runs the caption: PLEASE MY LITTLE GIRL NEEDS BLOOD. Although I already believe in the importance of donating blood, and I also believe it is important for the Red Cross to encourage people to donate it, I find myself questioning the implications of this ad. Can we donate blood, and ask that it be reserved for the exclusive use of little girls? Is the life of a little girl more valuable than the life of a little boy? Are the lives of children more valuable than the lives of adults? Of course, few people would donate blood unless they sympathized with those who need transfusions, and it may be unrealistic to expect logic in advertising. But consider how weak an argument becomes when the appeal to pity has little to do with the issue in question. Someone who has seldom attended class and failed all his [sic] examinations, but then tries to argue "I deserve to pass this class because I've had a lot of problems at home" is making a fallacious appeal to pity because the "argument" asks his instructor to overlook relevant evidence and make a decision favorable to the arguer because the instructor has been moved to feel sorry for him. You should be skeptical of any appeal to pity that is irrelevant to the conclusion or that seems designed to distract attention from other factors which you should be considering (p. 30-31).

*The Informed Argument* partially justifies its list of various kinds of fallacies on the grounds that some writers and speakers deliberately use them for "winning" an argument and that it is important to be alert for these in others' arguments. Fine. The question we'd like to raise is this: What purpose does a list like the above or an exercise in fallacy hunting serve in creating sound arguments? Even if students learn to discover fallacies in an argument, they are still not going to be able to infer that the opposing side has "won" or is preferable. At best all one can infer is that *this* specific argument is fallacious. It is still not enough basis on which to be able to "take a stand" on an "everyday argument."

The suggested activity of seeking unstated assumptions is equally problematic in the textbooks. *CIEQ*, for example, provides the following example of unstated assumptions in an argument on abortion:

1. Ours is a pluralistic society, in which we believe that the religious beliefs of one group should not be imposed on others.
2. Personal privacy is a right, and a woman's body is hers, not to be violated by laws that tell her she cannot do certain things to her body. But these and other arguments assume that a fetus is not—or not yet—a person, and therefore is not entitled to protection against assaults. Virtually all of us assume that it is wrong to kill a human being. Granted, we may find instances in which we believe it is acceptable to take a human life, such as self-defense against a would-be murderer, but even here we find a shared assumption, that persons are ordinarily entitled not to be killed.

The argument about abortion, then, usually depends on opposed assump-



tions. For one group, the fetus is a human being and a potential person—and this potentiality is decisive. But for the other group it is not. Persons arguing one side or the other of the abortion issue ought to be aware that opponents may not share their assumptions (1993, p. 35).

On the face of it, the above example seems straightforward enough. Although *CIEQ*'s assumptions about a fetus not being entitled to protection against assaults and of all living persons being entitled to life are viable assumptions, they constitute only one set of assumptions. As McPeck (1990) contends there is no method of determining what other assumptions the author might be making partly because there is a potentially indeterminate number of assumptions underlying any given premise, and that each of these possible assumptions may have an indeterminate number of assumptions underlying them. The different kinds of assumptions that we have seen from Scriven (1980) and Walton (1993) for avoiding a "strawman" and "making minimal assumptions" seem designed to create new assumptions about the argument, rather than uncovering "unexamined beliefs" or hidden assumptions. The analyst—in the present case the student-writer—seems to be engaged in such a process; students learn to infer assumptions even though they may not necessarily be implied by the argument. As McPeck warns us: This can be a "very dangerous business indeed, not only because it can easily strap someone with an assumption that they were not in fact making, but also because it threatens to strip argument analysis of its objective integrity by encouraging subjective interpretations" (1990, p. 8).

## DISCUSSION

An assumption in the CT practice, and one that has been lurking beneath our discussion so far, concerns the relatively unproblematic way in which critical thinking skills are generally seen to be useful and transferable across knowledge domains (Ennis, 1985; Glaser, 1984). Knowledge-transfer, as research shows us, is a debated notion: On the one hand, researchers like Ennis (1981; 1984), Glaser (1984), and Rubenstein and Firstenberg (1987) maintain that higher-order abilities such as problem-solving and deductive competence can be taught through informal logic tools that will enable learners to reason successfully. This group of scholars, who believe that domain-specific knowledge (more in keeping with our discipline-oriented stand) is not conducive to "good thinking" (Nickerson, 1987), cite research in cognitive science, developmental psychology and human intelligence to support their stand. In fact, Glaser (1984) believes that:

A student does not tend "naturally" to develop a general disposition to consider thoughtfully the subjects and problems that come within the range of his or her experience; nor is he or she likely to acquire knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning and skill in applying these methods simply as a result of having studied this subject or that. There is little evidence



that students acquire skill in critical thinking as a necessary by-product of the study of [any] given subject (p.27).

On the other hand, there are scholars like Butterfield and Nelson (1991), McPeck (1990), and Evans (1982) who lean toward the other side in their skepticism about a general system of logical competence. They prefer to see thought-processes as situated and highly content- and context-dependent. Evans has this to say:

We are forced to the conclusion that people manifest little ability for general deductive reasoning in these experiments. Very little behavior can be attributed to an *a priori* system that is independent of the particular task content and structure. This does not mean that people cannot reason correctly in contexts where they have no relevant and appropriate experience—indeed some evidence suggests that they can. It does mean, however, that adults' reasoning ability is far more concrete and context-dependent than has been generally believed (1982, p. 254).

Butterfield and Nelson's views (1991) also problematize the idea that reasoning skills can cut across knowledge domains. They, along with several other researchers (Bassok & Holyoak, 1989; Cooper & Sweller, 1987; Gick & Holyoak, 1983; Novick, 1988; Singley & Anderson, 1989), maintain that the general consensus on the transfer of instruction is that

the majority of investigations have not found flexible use of appropriate variants of taught knowledge and strategies in diverse contexts and for diverse purposes" (Butterfield & Nelson, 1989, p. 69).

While some level of transferability might be possible (Norris, 1985) across some related knowledge domains—whether it is at a macro-level of critical thinking (Greenfield, 1987; Stice, 1987; Woods, 1987) or at a micro-level of specific information processing (Sternberg, 1985, 1987)—the point we are trying to underscore is this: The transfer and general applicability of critical thinking/reasoning skills is at best a debatable one. Thus, for so many composition textbooks—indeed composition programs, syllabi, and other pedagogical tools—to be based on such grounds is cause for serious reconsideration.

Our own stand on the knowledge-transfer issue, especially regarding CT and L2 learners, leans more toward the view that learning—including the teaching of writing—is situated and context/discipline-dependent. We have argued elsewhere (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a,b) and we would like to stress again in this paper that situating advanced writing courses in specific academic disciplines holds greater promise because specific academic disciplines represent ways of organizing information that are not only freer of cultural constraints (certainly not entirely free of them), but that they also contain the means for event/problem-analyzing that are more controlled by the paradigms of the discipline and consequently may

be somewhat independent of the means, inherent in English or in the students' first languages, for organizing events. Because each discipline constitutes its own "culture" and world-view—inasmuch as each has its own conventions and rules regarding what constitutes effective and appropriate writing for that discipline—each one also determines to a large extent what constitute "problems" and appropriate solutions to those problems as well. Based on 15 years of intensive research across several grade levels and disciplines, Freedman (1995) surmises that "each class seemed to produce its own genre—in the light of traditional definitions relating to textual regularities. For the most part, these pieces were arguments, in which a thesis was stated and supported (sometimes with digression, but significantly with different degrees of tolerance for digression by discipline...)" (p. 133). Furthermore, she found that writing in the disciplines is more supported and facilitated than writing for one composition class. "In Bakhtin's (1986) terms, the students respond dialogically to what was experienced in the class, ventriloquating the social languages therein heard and read, as they developed their own answers to the questions set in the assignment by the teacher" (pp. 133-34). Students are more likely to develop a rhetorical awareness, analyze a complex rhetorical situation before deciding on the combination of writing strategies that would best present their purposes if they were doing so within viable disciplinary contexts (Hill & Resnick, 1995). As we have discussed elsewhere, a (written) text is acceptable within a discourse community only insofar as it adheres to that discipline's world view (Ramanathan & Kaplan 1996a), and the discipline partially determines, who is "qualified" to speak and write, "... what may be spoken, and how it is to be said. . ." [as well as] "... what is reasonable and what foolish, and what is meant and what not" (Leitch, 1983, p. 145). In other words, the discipline, by establishing its boundaries and regularities, highlights the importance of certain rhetorical strategies, genres, styles over others, thus serving to constrain and contextualize discourse.

In conclusion then, what we are suggesting is that 4-year universities adopt a writing-across-the-curriculum type of model where faculty across disciplines would be responsible for teaching content through writing (Larson, 1994; Young, 1991; 1994). Larson (1994) specifies at least the following advantages of adopting such an approach. First, although teachers may be inexperienced in the teaching of writing, they are "in most cases warmly interested in and familiar with their subject areas, able to guide students in gathering and interpreting data for discussion...able to encourage mastery of the kinds of thinking and reasoning that are honored in their particular field..." (p. 122) in their writing; Second, students gain experience and practice thinking about issues relevant to the field; Third, students gain a sense of the "value of writing as a means of practicing the discipline; and Fourth, students are more likely to get more practice at writing than they would in a composition course after which they sigh with relief "at not having to 'worry' any more about writing" (122-23). Like Young (1994) we believe that adopting such a model would require major structural, university-wide changes,

ones that would bring about change in "shared beliefs, attitudes and social patterns that shape our lives in pervasive and unsuspected ways" (p. 137). Not only would such an approach provide students with contexts with more accessible diameters, it would also mitigate some of the problems currently faced by L2 student-writers when confronted with teaching materials (e.g., the textbooks) primarily written for L1 audiences.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the editor and two anonymous reviewers for their incisive feedback on our paper. It has greatly benefited from the devil's-advocate position adopted by one of them. We would also like to thank Joe Abbott, Dwight Atkinson, Suresh Canagarajah, Bill Eggington, John Hedgecock, and Ann Johns for their comments on either earlier drafts of this paper or the version of this paper that was presented at AAAL, March, 1996, Chicago.

### NOTE

1. Freire (1984) believes that human beings "can detach themselves from the world" (p. 16); that when they enter into social reality from this detached perspective, the 'true interrelations' they will discover will embody injustices which the people will then be able to diagnose and correct, an argument that Bizzell (1992) found very congenial in her early work on academic thinking and teaching methods that she believed would foster critical consciousness.

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## APPENDIX: SELECTED TOPICS FROM CURRENT L1 FRESHMAN COMPOSITION TEXTBOOKS

1. Barnet, B. & Bedau, H. (1993) (3rd ed.) *Current issues and enduring questions: a guide to critical thinking and argument*. Boston: Bedford Books.
 

Bilingual education	Gun control
Testing for drugs	Capital punishment
Gun control	Nuclear armaments
Capital punishment	Free speech
Nuclear armaments	Right to life
Free speech	
2. Bradbury, N. & Quinn, A. (1994). (2nd ed.). *Audiences and intentions*. New York: Macmillan.
 

Education	Freedom of expression
Women's rights	Our relationship to our natural environment
Prejudice	Sex, gender and family
Freedom of expression	Politics
3. Colombo, G., Cullen, R., & Lisle, B. (1992). *Rereading America: cultural contexts for critical thinking and writing*. Boston: Bedford Books.
 

Money and Success	Education and empowerment
Nature and technology	Mass media
Melting pot	Democracy
Family/home	
4. George, D. & Trimbur, J. (1992). *Reading culture: Contexts for critical reading and writing*. New York: Harper Collins.
 

Generations	Style
Television culture	Public space
History	Images
5. Greenberg, R. & Comprone, J. (1994). *Contexts and communities*. New York: Macmillan.
 

Women in the corporate work place	TV and culture
Censorship	Consumerism
6. Kirsznner, L. & Mandell, S. (1992). *Patterns for college writing: rhetorical reader and guide*. New York: St. Martins.
 

History and politics	Ethics, justice and religion
Language and literature	Education, business and work

7. Lunsford, A. & Ruskiewicz, J. (1994). *The presence of others: Readings for critical thinking and writing*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Gender	Views about minority voices
Sexuality	

8. Miller, R. (1989). (2nd ed.). *The informed argument*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

Drug testing	Censorship
Gun control	Animal experimentation
Capital punishment	Competition

9. Rottenberg, A. (1994). *Elements of argument*. Boston: Bedford Books

Abortion	Euthanasia
Animal rights	Freedom of speech
Children's right	Gay and lesbian rights
Endangered species	Multicultural studies
Sex education	

10. Seyler, D. (1991). (3rd ed.). *Read, reason, write*. New York: McGraw.

Television	Sexism
Affirmative action	Pornography
Right to bear arms	Censorship
Capital punishment	

11. Rye, M. (1994). *Making cultural connections: Readings for critical analysis*. Boston: Bedford Books.

Functions of the family	Environment of prejudice
Defining women's lives	Cultures in contact
Working in the world	

12. Ramage, J. & Bean, J. (1995). (3rd ed.). *Writing arguments*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Guns and public safety	Global warming
Mercy killing	Single parenthood
Civil disobedience	Legalizing drugs
Sexual harassment	

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# Journal of MULTILINGUAL and MULTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Editor John Edwards

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ISSN 0143-4632 6 x p.a. Library/Institution Individual/School/Student

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# Teachers' Discursive Practices: Co-Construction of their Group Voices

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*This study focuses on teachers' group identity, seen as a process of co-construction of their group voices, as those voices emerge, are constructed or reconstructed in large-group dialogues. The participants were 28 experienced teachers who were engaged in an innovative 14-month mid-career program. The whole-group dialogues held in the second half of the program were tape recorded and transcribed and constitute the discourse basis for analysis. The contextualization of this discourse was supported by field notes and background information. Discourse analysis was carried out at macro and micro level and led to the following results: 1) There were identified three types of dialogues: conversation, discussion after a presentation, and reporting small-group conversations, which differ in structure and interactional dynamics, allowing more or less expression and development of teachers voices. 2) There were four types of teachers' voices: pragmatic, multiculturalist, critical, and socio-constructivist. These were deeply linked to the voices of the tradition of thought and discourse in education. 3) Teachers' use of personal pronouns index their social relations in the dynamics of the dialogue, through which teachers construct their group voices and identities. The opportunities for all the voices to be raised, heard, and developed is discussed within a cultural and sociopolitical context of teacher education.*

## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

When experienced teachers get together in small groups, in the context of a mid-career program, they often miss the opportunity to engage in academic-theoretical discourse and they avoid falling into open disagreement regarding any issue. However, they may develop a very strong group identity and a commitment to help each other and to listen to what any member of the group wants to share (Torres, 1995a). The present study focuses on this issue of group identity, seen as a process of co-construction of their group voices, as those voices emerge, are constructed or reconstructed in a large-group dialogical interaction. These voices are analyzed in the context of the dominant ideologies of teacher education using both Bakhtin's and Freire's notions of dialogue. The context of this study is a master's program in which experienced teachers engage in conversations among themselves about their concerns, experiences, work conditions, and common endeavors.



## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A DIALOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON TEACHERS' CONVERSATIONS

This study is framed within a dialogical perspective. Dialogue is understood in the sense developed by Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and his followers (Todorov, 1981; Clark & Holquist, 1984; Rommetveit, 1990, 1992; Wertsch, 1990, 1991; Markova, 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992; Luckmann, 1990, 1992; Linell, 1990; Drew, 1991; Graumann, 1989, 1990)—a notion of dialogue that is highly compatible with that of Freire (1992 [1970]). For these theorists, dialogue goes beyond the mere verbal face-to-face interaction between two persons, to involve several persons whose utterances may be distant in time and space. Bakhtin attributes to the utterance a dialogical character. Thus, each utterance is a response to prior utterances and is also a generator of future utterances. Meanwhile, Freire defines dialogue as “the encounter between men [women] mediated by the world in order to name the world” (p.76, brackets added). Whereas Bakhtin’s notion of dialogue with regard to the nature of utterance is descriptive, Freire’s is prescriptive. At any rate, Bakhtin’s and Freire’s understanding of dialogue is concerned with the sense and reality of human existence. Hence for them, *to be* as human beings is *to-be-in-relation*, that is, in an ongoing dialogue. Consequently *knowing*, even the knowing of oneself, is a dialogical process. Markova’s (1990a) distinction between *dialogue* and *dialogism* helps us to understand the depth and extent of meaning and implication of a dialogical perspective. She points out the difference yet complementarity of the terms ‘dialogue’ and ‘dialogism’. Thus ‘dialogue’ is specific and is referred to as: “symbolic communication that is face to face” (p. 4); whereas ‘dialogism’ is a philosophy, which she defines as: “an epistemological approach to the study of mind and language as historical and cultural phenomena” (p. 4).

In the empirical world, including interaction among teachers, there are different types of dialogue with distinct social functions and different degrees of asymmetries in knowledge, participation, and contributions to the unfolding of meaning. Conversation is one of those types of dialogue. Luckmann (1990) distinguishes between dialogue and conversation, characterizing the latter as a kind of dialogue in which participants tend to have equality in their participation, relatively low institutional and social constraints. It is important to indicate that dialogue is for Freire (1992) what conversation is for Luckmann. Freire emphasizes the horizontality or symmetry of power in the relationship among dialoguers to attain true communication, which is the basis of an authentic education. In the context of teacher education programs and that of school organization and culture, teachers do not have the opportunity to engage in dialogue (Freire’s sense) among themselves and even less with university educators or school administrators. Hence, teachers have little chance as a professional group to “name their world” (Freire’s expression) or to have a distinctive group “voice” (Bakhtin’s term).

### **Co-construction of individual and group voices**

Inspired by Bakhtin's dialogism, Wertsch (1991) and Grauman (1990), among others, characterize dialogue as a 'polyphony of voices': "The polyphony of dialogue originates in the variety of voices both between and within interlocutors" (Grauman, 1990, p. 122). Through the voices of the actual participants in the dialogue come the voices of the tradition of thought and discourse in a community or in a society. Linell and Jönsson (1991) interpret Bakhtin's (1986) notion of voices as the "ways of articulating perspectives and concerns that are prototypical of different traditions of thought and discourse in modern society" (p. 77). Thus, voice and dialogue are relational terms, as is perspective. Regarding voice, Wertsch (1991) considers that Bakhtin's notion of voice "cannot be reduced to an account of vocal-auditory signals....It applies to written as well as spoken communication, and it is concerned with the broader issues of a speaking subject's perspective, conceptual horizon, intention, and world view" (p. 51). Thus, individual voices are socially originated, maintained, or silenced. Although the pervasive character of structures and ideologies over individual voices is real, as Linell and Luckmann (1991) point out, it is important to consider also the reciprocity of this influence; that is, the influence of some individual voices in the transformation of those social structures and ideologies to improve human living. In this pursuit, Fairclough (1992) proclaims the power of the discourse and Freire (1992 [1970]) proclaims the power of the pedagogy of dialogue.

Concerning teachers' voices, Elbaz (1990) identifies 'voice' as one of the three major concepts in the discourse on teacher's thinking: "the term is always used against the background of a previous silence, and it is a political usage as well as an epistemological one" (p. 17). Teacher's voice is a commitment "to return to teachers the right to speak for and about teaching" (p. 17). She then describes what she means by teacher's voice: "the first is the power to name, to define one's own reality and to determine, at least in part, the way the rest of the world must relate to that reality; the second is the power to care for and sustain oneself and others, to maintain the dignity and integrity of those named" (p. 17). For Elbaz, to have a 'voice' is to have a language for articulating our own concerns, to recognize those concerns and to have an audience who will really listen to us. Meanwhile, O'Loughlin (1990) frames teacher's voice within a social constructivist perspective and maintains that acknowledging voice "is also an affirmation of the diverse cultures, languages and perspectives that students [and teachers] hold" (p. 13, brackets added).

The advocacy for teacher's voice within a psychological framework stresses the individual voice; however, from a dialogical perspective "the speaking personality, speaking consciousness" (Holquist & Emerson, 1981, p. 434), although unique as an individual utterance, echoes other utterances written or spoken in the past and also addresses known or unknown others. Hence individual voices develop as group voices develop. Neither one is previous to the other. They mutually constitute and influence one another. That is, their relationship is dialectical. In the

context of the situation of this study, when teachers meet together to talk about their work and their feelings, they are building both their individual voices and their group voices through each others' ideas and perspectives.

### **Identity and personal/group voice**

Speaking of construction of personal and group voices is similar to talking about identity as Taylor (1989) understands and develops it in depth. First of all he considers that what defines our identity is "whatever gives us our fundamental orientation" (p. 28). Thus the question of identity, 'who am I?', is based on what has crucial value for me, gives sense to my life and orients my thoughts and actions:

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame and horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose (p. 27).

For Taylor the *self* is inherently social, therefore he rejects the notion of a disengaged image of the self: "one is a self only among other selves" (p. 35). Hence, *self-definition* can happen only in interdependence with others: "The full definition of someone's identity thus usually involves not only his stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community". Interlocutors and dialogue partners are essential for achieving *self-definition*: "The self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution'" (p. 36). Hence, *self-definition* or *self-interpretation* is both a constitutive part of the self and inherently social. Taylor's notion of the *self*, as constituted by and constitutive of cultures and social structures of which it is a part, is related to Bakhtin's notion of utterance/voice. In Bakhtin's (1986) words: "each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication" (p. 91).

### **Language and co-construction of voices**

The study of teachers' discourse allows us to look into their perspectives on education as they are reflected, constructed or reconstructed in dialogue with other teachers. The language used in any educational community may index social practices that are in their turn constitutive components of community voices. In this regard, Rymes (1995) examines closely the language that high school dropouts use in constructing their self-agency: "The language these young men and women use provides a window into the way they perceive themselves and their place in the social world" (p. 495); and Wortham (1996) points out the role of language in creating, maintaining, or transforming positions taken by participants in a dialogue. Regarding personal *pronouns* he indicates: "speakers often use these forms to establish what roles they are playing with respect to each other." Thus the use of pronouns in a dialogue may index "participants' interactional positions" (p. 333).

The notion of *indexicality* is considered in this study not as a simple one-to-one association, *i.e.*, words or grammatical structures that represent specific identities. Rather, the sense of *indexing* taken in this study is that of specific characteristics of language as *indirectly constitutive* of those social identities through social practices. Ochs (1992), discussing the relation between language and gender, illustrates how indexing can be a constitutive relationship: "By positing a constitutive relation between language and gender, I mean that one or more linguistic features may *index* social meanings (e.g. stances, social acts, social activities), which in turn helps to constitute gender meanings" (p. 341).

By specifically examining pronouns and their indexical function, Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990) analyze the connections between language and the construction of self, social relations, and interpersonal attitudes. "We try to show that there are distinctive senses of self identifiable in diverse cultures with languages that differ in just the dimension of indexicality of the first person" (p. 18). They point out the lack of distinct pronouns in English for distinguishing between a dyadic or dual 'we' and a 'we' that includes many; or for indicating inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the interlocutors. Such distinctions are found in some Australian Aboriginal pronoun systems. Concerning the pronoun 'we,' these authors indicate it is used to signal "group indexicality," whereby the speaker establishes a connection with his/her interlocutors, sharing responsibility with them and consequently attenuating his/her responsibility. The fact of conceiving 'we' as indexing 'belonging' or 'groupiness' places on this pronoun a sort of intimacy that 'they' does not have. However, the transition to the indeterminate pronoun 'one' diminishes this intimacy.

The role of pronouns in indexing social relations has also been examined by Birch (1989). He analyzes a poem in which the author (a Native American) transforms the relationship 'we-you' to a more distant relationship 'we-they.' By substituting the pronoun 'they' for 'you' the author not only distances himself from the others but excludes 'them' from the dialogue. In this respect Benveniste (1966) considers the third person as a 'non-person' because it is outside the relation 'I-you.' Asymmetries in dialogue may be indexed by switching participants in the dialogue from active to side participants; from 'you' to 'he' (third person) (Aronsson, 1991), or from 'you' to 'it' (Rommetveit, 1991). In conversations the use of pronouns, especially 'we,' allows participants to introduce distancing, manipulation, bonding, etc. This function will be very relevant to the analysis of teachers' dialogues in this study.

## METHOD

### Context of the situation

**Participants:** This study looks at dialogue among twenty-eight experienced teachers who were attending a 14-month mid-career program while teaching at different academic levels from kindergarten through high school. With respect to their



cultural background, there were 14 European-Americans and 14 participants from minority groups, including Chicanas and Mexican-Americans, two Native Americans and one self-designated 'Afrolatina'. Some of the weekly activities of the program, those involving whole-group dialogical interaction, were tape recorded and transcribed; these constitute the corpus of discourse. Field notes of the setting and institutional context complemented the transcribed recordings.

**Context of the dialogues:** The dialogues which form the basis of this study took place in the second period of the mid-career program teachers were attending. These whole-group dialogues were planned to provide teachers with opportunities to share classroom experiences and professional concerns, and to comment and reflect on educational issues considered to be relevant for most of them. These situations are relevant to the philosophy of the program, which encourages teachers to study their own teaching by means of self-reflection, sharing experiences and knowledge with other teachers and participating in construction of pedagogical knowledge while building community and networks with other local and distant teachers. Part of the program is carried out by peer support teachers (PSTs), fellow teachers who had participated previously in the program. Their main role is to support participants in the study of their own teaching and to help them find ways to engage in such study. Additionally, this is a collaborative mid-career program between the state university and local public schools.

### **Discourse analysis**

In this study, the analysis of teachers' voices is based on their discourse, complemented with field notes and information about the context of this discourse including the situational, institutional and broad cultural and sociopolitical context. The focus on teachers' discourse is founded on the poststructuralist recognition of the interdependence between discourse and social practices. To mention some of its major exponents: One of the insights of Foucault (1972) is his view of discourse as constitutive of social identities, subject positions, types of selves, social relationships, objects of knowledge (disciplines) and systems of beliefs. All of these are constructed according to certain rules and orders of society and discourse, and determined by forms and relations of power (cf. Lynch & Hilles, this volume). Bourdieu (1977) maintains that through discourse or symbolic power dominant views are embedded in the system of beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions of a culture and a society. Inspired by Foucault's thought, Fairclough (1992) states that: "Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (p. 64). In like manner, for Bakhtin (1981) language is 'ideologically saturated', 'a world view' as opposed to an abstract system of signs. Concerning educational discourse, Bernstein (1990) argues about the crucial role of pedagogical discourse as mediating power, knowledge and formation of consciousness. Meanwhile Cazden (1988) considers education, as any other social institution, a 'communication system'. Hence, she points out: "The basic purpose of school is achieved through



communication" (p. 2). Therefore, she maintains "the study of classroom discourse is the study of that communication system" (p. 2).

By looking closely at teachers' talk, this study proposes to see how voice and perspective are expressed and/or constructed in discourse. The notion of *voice* has been developed as opposed to prior silence within the context of a critical and liberating tradition of thought and discourse, whereas *perspective* has been defined as a viewpoint or orientation toward certain objects, relations or actions, within the phenomenological philosophy. In this paper voice, voices and perspective are used as interchangeable terms, although in the analysis of texts the term perspective is most often used. As indicated above, voice and voices have been defined in terms of articulation of perspectives and concerns about a specific issue.

Graumann (1990) introduces the concept of perspective for the study of the structure and dynamics of dialogue. He means by *perspective* a point of view, a frame of reference, a professional framework of knowledge and interests. Perspective for him is an interactional, hence dynamical phenomenon, as are dialogue and voice(s). *Setting a perspective* is an invitation to dialogue. In a similar way, Linell and Jönsson (1991) conceive of perspective as a particular orientation of one or more of the participants in a dialogue toward an object or topic. Actually, this understanding of perspective as *orientation* is similar to Taylor's (1989) basic definition of *identity* as a fundamental orientation in our lives. Graumann (1990) emphasizes the evolution of the mutuality of perspectives: "Whatever I present as my view on a given matter, I offer as a potential perspective for others" (p. 112). Therefore, Graumann indicates, this perspective may be accepted, rejected, transcended, negotiated or ignored. Graumann's analysis of the perspectival dynamics is oriented toward establishing the sequence of arguments which shows the perspectival unfolding of the shared topic even in the case when a perspective is rejected. Perspectival unfolding implies development and choice, both within each participant's and among many participants' perspectives regarding the same issue. Graumann states this as follows: "The act of making an aspect a subject of discourse is an act of selection and an effort to structure (control) the next phase of the dialogue in accordance with one's *values*" (p. 117). Hence setting or taking a perspective on a given matter involves also an attitude expressed by evaluative comments and/or by using specific linguistic devices. "Sometimes the distancing or identifying attitude is recognizable (perhaps involuntarily) in the choice of pronouns or of personal versus impersonal forms of immediacy vs. non-immediacy" (p. 120).

The analysis of the text and its context, including the context of the situation and the institutional and sociopolitical context of education, is directly linked to the fundamental principles of a sociocultural approach to the study of language and its function in society (Halliday and Hassan, 1985). Hence, the analysis of discourse produced in a specific situation should include the specific characteristics of the language in use and its situational, institutional and societal context

(Fairclough, 1989, 1992). This may imply at least two levels of analysis: the micro or the analysis of the text (the *minutiae* of the language used) and the specific context in which it is produced, and the macro level on which the analysis focuses on the institutional and sociopolitical context of education.

In this study the macroanalysis consisted of a holistic examination of the corpus of discourse, by which main types of dialogues or speech genres as well as the most persistent teachers' voices were identified and interpreted within the institutional and sociopolitical context of education. This analysis was based on the transcriptions of the dialogues, field notes and context information. The "overwording" (dense use of related terms as defined by Fairclough, 1992) of teachers' discourse was helpful also in the identification of their voices.

The microanalysis of the discourse focused on two main aspects: 1) Perspectival dynamics and divergence of perspectives on a given topic, including connections of these specific perspectives to the most representative types of teachers' voices identified. 2) Some linguistic features indexing participants' perspectives on a given matter, such as: a) personal pronouns, and the role they play in creating and transforming social relations in the dynamics of the dialogue; and b) "overwording" of teachers' perspectives on education.

The microanalysis was carried out for only 8 dialogues, which were selected according to the following criteria: they represent the typical dialogues of each speech genre, and in those dialogues participants continued at least ten minutes talking about and jointly developing the same topic.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA: GROWING AND SILENCING VOICES

### Three main types of whole-group dialogues

Throughout the corpus of discourse I distinguished three different types of dialogues or speech genres (cf. Bakhtin 1986): *conversation*, *discussion after a presentation*, and *reporting small-group conversation*. These genres correspond roughly to different purposes and types of group interaction, loosely set up by the program staff, and the evolving dynamics of the dialogical interaction as well. There were also situations in which these three main types of dialogues were combined. It is important to note that the nature of the whole-group dialogues changed over the semester: the dialogues become less focused and shorter.

The distinctive characteristics of each of these types of dialogues or speech genres are summarized in Table 1. It was possible to identify five categories upon which these three types of dialogues may be compared: 1) Openness of agenda; 2) Introduction of the topic: staff or participants; 3) Necessity of staying on the topic; 4) Role of staff; and 5) Structure of interaction. By and large *openness* may be a dimension to consider in comparing these dialogues. They went from relatively open conversation to less open, report-type. Openness means participants' freedom to initiate conversations, to introduce new topics, and to engage in discussing

educational issues among themselves with no direct intervention by the program staff. This kind of openness was determined to a great extent by the structure of the meeting as set up by the program staff (purpose, time allowed, topic, role of the staff in introducing topics, readdressing the flow of the dialogue, commenting on and evaluating participants' contributions). The less structure set up by the program staff, the more open were the dialogues that took place.

Dialogues also differed in the structure of the interaction considering two basic groups: staff on one hand and participants on the other. In the *conversation* type of dialogues, staff members and participants approached symmetrical rights of speakership; whereas in the other two types of dialogues, *discussion after presentation* and *reporting small-group conversation*, the staff had more control over the course of the dialogue. In Table 1 under the category *Structure of the interaction*, in the *conversation* type of dialogue the staff and participants approach equal rights of speakership; staff members were equal participants in the conversation. On the other hand, in *discussion after presentation* and in *reporting small-group conversation* staff and participants had asymmetrical rights of speakership. The staff coordinator of the dialogue alternated turns with participants, had more control over the subtopics to be discussed than the participants and had more opportunities to respond, comment and react to participants' comments.

The differences among these three types of teachers' dialogues, *conversation*, *discussion after presentation* and *reporting small-group conversation*, highlight the role of external control over the structure and dynamics of the dialogues among teachers: the more open (less external control), the more fluid the dialogue, the closer to a conversation. This insight is not only important for teacher education, to encourage true dialogical encounters (Freire's, 1992 sense) or true conversations (Luckmann's, 1990 sense) among teachers; *i.e.*, approaching symmetrical rights of speakership. As teachers experience in their education the benefits of having dialogues among peers, they transfer these strategies into their classrooms (Torres, 1996).

### **"Polyphony" of teachers' voices**

We may describe teachers' dialogues as a 'polyphony' of their distinct individual voices, their group voices and those coming from the traditions of thought and discourse in education and school culture. In the dynamics of the dialogues, a teacher's utterance (an expression of her/his voice) was followed by other teachers' utterances (expression of their voices) that united or counterposed to the previous utterances, configuring in this way group voices. In other words, once a voice was raised, it interanimated other voices to address the same issue, resulting in a polyphony. *Voice* as defined above is a perspective, an orientation toward a given subject matter, which in this study was an educational issue. Thus different voices in the dialogues were identified as different perspectives on education, on the basis of a holistic analysis of the corpus of discourse, field notes and context information. Different voices or perspectives emerged from the discourse analy-

Table 1: Types of teachers' dialogues in a large group

Openness: _____ More _____ Less _____			
<i>Categories</i>	<i>Conversation</i>	<i>Discussion after presentation</i>	<i>Reporting small-group conversation</i>
<b>agenda</b>	open	open, but limited to the general topic of presentation	more restricted
<b>who introduces topic</b>	primarily participants	staff	staff sets up general topic or task, but small groups determine focus
<b>necessity of staying on topic</b>	no necessity	participants required to say on general or related topic	participants required to stay on topic
<b>role of the staff</b>	to give turns to self-selected participants within flow of conversation	to answer questions, comment and evaluate participants' comments, readdress focus, give turns	to moderate: assign turns to each small group relator, comment and evaluate participants' comments and readdress the focus.
<b>structure of the interaction</b>	approaches symmetrical rights of speakership	staff moderator controls rights of speakership	staff moderator controls rights of speakership



sis by looking through the 'overwording' (Fairclough, 1992) or 'overlexicality' (Fowler & Kress, 1979): a group of synonyms and related expressions to refer to or to predicate a specific educational issue. From the dialogues examined it was possible to identify four prototypical voices: the *pragmatic*, the *multiculturalist*, the *critical*, and the *social constructivist*.

In general terms the type of voice was related to the ethnic background of the participants. Thus European-American participants aligned more frequently with the *pragmatic voices* whereas participants from minority groups aligned more frequently with the *multicultural* and/or *critical voices*. This distinction was pretty obvious. Nonetheless, often the same teacher spoke explicitly with different voices, in the way she or he contrasted different viewpoints regarding the same issue. As Graumann (1990) indicates for this case, the speaker could use linguistic devices such as *for one thing... for another thing, on the one hand... on the other hand*, etc. The taking of alternative perspectives by the same speaker in the same utterance is called by Graumann (1990) "mental reservation" and marked in discourse by conjunctions and adverbs such as: *but, yet, however*, etc. Other teachers also used these markers to bring up a different perspective from that set up by previous speakers in the dialogue. Torres (1995b) found that teachers in dialogue very often use the discourse marker *but* to disagree and eventually state an alternative perspective to the one they disagree with.

### *The pragmatic voices*

These voices were identified by the 'overwording' of *practice*. Teachers who most identify with this perspective focused strongly on the *how to* of their work. Their discourse on educational issues is full of expressions such as: "*How can we do*", "*How to do*" and "*We need to do*". Thus, the *how tos* or *practical* things are what is important and relevant to them. Pragmatic voices are quite salient in the following excerpts.

On one occasion teachers were discussing a presentation about portfolios and process-folios, since they were invited to participate in refining the idea of process-folio based on a diagram that contained the different aspects to consider. After a short discussion on why process-folio and not portfolio, Bob argued strongly to look at practical implications rather than talking on a conceptual level:

"Everyone has a different process to acquire knowledge... So this diagram may work very beautifully for someone else... But that does not help everyone. **We** are looking for **WHAT WE CAN DO** (stressed) as teachers; and how **our** students learn better".

From this perspective, what matters for teachers in this kind of academic situation is the practical implication for the classroom. Bob continues:

"Changing to the word process-folio rather than portfolio, that's totally irrelevant. How this diagram is set up and the information in it is totally irrelevant."



evant... What's relevant is *how can we* apply the idea of this paper in **our** classroom settings... What's relevant is how **we** can try it out and say this is the way **I** will apply it in conferences with parents... To **me** that's the important thing".

Bob's use of the pronoun **we** and the corresponding possessive pronoun **our** allows him to portray teachers' needs and interests as different from those the program staff is selecting for them. By using **we** in this strategical way, his critique of the staff is framed as a critique of a 'group' of teachers and not his alone. Actually he is gaining allies and therefore power to oppose the staff. Bob's opposition is not only a result of the dynamics developed in this specific dialogue; it also has to do with gender issues. A more holistic examination of Bob's behavior allowed me to tie this incident to his systematic opposition to whatever issue was presented by the female staff members. This opposition did not take place when the staff member was male.

Although Bob was one of 28 teachers in the room, and one of only two male participants, his *pragmatic voice* was very salient. He usually participated several times in the same conversation topic and his utterances were almost always longer than those of the other participants, who paid attention to him and rarely disagreed openly with him.

Actually, Bob's *pragmatic voice* is his appropriation of a very deeply rooted orientation of teacher education by which teachers are trained to be *practitioners*. Consequently, they are not given many opportunities to engage in theoretical discussions, and even fewer to establish ongoing theory-practice connections. On the contrary, they are often induced to divorce themselves from theories that are not expressed in terms of *how to do* or the direct *practical application* in their classrooms. Thus their perspectives on education are essentially instrumental or technological. Stressing procedural types of knowledge, the *how tos* preempt even reflection on their practice, as in the previous situation when Bob referred to comments on a written piece as "intellectual and humorless".

It is important to note that the two men in the group were identified the most with a *pragmatic* perspective on education. They best articulated the basic premises of this perspective. Many women teachers in this group sympathized with the practical implications of the issues they were discussing but they were also concerned with other issues beside the practical ones. Lola, for instance, shared a valuable experience in a conference on teaching science. She highly valued that conference because of the immediate applications to the classroom:

"They didn't talk about methodology. They didn't talk about educational philosophy. They talked about REAL SCIENCE (stressed) that you can apply immediately to your classroom. I don't mean to put down teachers but... Yeah, this was different and was incredible."

Although Lola is contrasting methodology and educational philosophy with

REAL SCIENCE *applicable* in the classroom, her emphasis was on the relevance of the curriculum to students, specifically to ESL (English as a Second Language) and Chicano students. I had access to this context information since I was sitting at the same table with her and heard the small-group conversation.

In a longitudinal study with student-teachers McWilliam (1994) identified some metaphors used by them such as: 'therapy talk' and 'managerial talk' among others. For instance, in talking about pedagogical issues, these student-teachers change over time: from 'egalitarian' kind of talk to 'expert-need-talk', 'how to', 'managerial talk', passing through several other kinds of talk and metaphors. McWilliam's study is a clear example of the process of socialization of teachers at college and in schools, on this kind of *pragmatic* perspective on education.

### *The multicultural voices*

In general terms the program endorsed the multicultural voices and also began to develop a *socio-constructivist voice*. These are actually complementary rather than opposing perspectives of education. Most of this group of teachers had already been socialized for and were working somewhat with a *multicultural perspective*. Demands for *diversity* considerations were very often the basis for criticizing certain programs, attitudes, actions and perspectives. There was an 'overwording' of synonyms such as: *diversity*, *cultural* or *ethnic background*, *multiple perspectives*, *multiple ways of knowing*, *multiple intelligences*, etc.

In accordance with the *multicultural* perspective on education, teachers brought up the differences in needs and interests of students as well as teachers as a necessary condition to engage in some academic activities. In this respect Gladys reports the discussion of her small group about the conversation the staff group modeled for participants. This conversation was about a pregnant adolescent's academic behavior in the classroom:

"One of the things we talked about was... how irrelevant was the reading, how irrelevant it would seem to a pregnant adolescent. We don't know the ethnic background of the young women. But.. you know those writings are wonderful, but we have to have a cultural context for it, and we thought that, you know, who would want to read that (classic literature) in view of that particular situation... We also talked about what is the value of free writing... who said writing is so important... Maybe some of the *people* have oral traditions and listening for them is much more important than writing".

Since this was a situation of reported speech, Gladys was expressing what her group said. Her peers in the group articulated best the multicultural perspective on education. She used the pronoun *we* to index her small group as co-responsible for such a perspective, excluding the other teachers and the staff. In her categorical statement "*we* have to have a cultural background for it" the use of the pronoun *we* helps her more to attenuate the demanding tone of the statement rather than to index a specific group. It is not clear who is included or excluded from that

group. This is interesting since Gladys is a Native American, with a long history of oral tradition; however, she refers to them as *the people*, characterizing herself as a reporter without referring to her own history.

Compatible with the *multicultural perspective* is the idea of *democratic education* expressed in terms of *participation, choices or alternatives* given to students. Martha criticizes the DARE program (see below) concerning the key phrase "Just say NO", arguing against the negative emphasis:

"We need as teachers to teach 'em how to say yes and to give 'em choices. We take away things that *people* want them to keep away from, but *we* don't give 'em things that they should turn to either. We need to give 'em alternatives".

Martha is setting up her perspective with respect to the program DARE. Her use of the pronoun *we* helps her to establish bonds with others and to commit themselves to give *choices* to children. At the same time she separates teachers (including herself) from others she calls *people*. In using the common noun *people* in contrast with the personal pronoun *we*, she actually gains support to voice a commitment statement on behalf of teachers, "we as teachers".

### *The critical voices*

Critical voices in this group became silent as the program went on. At the very beginning of the program they were among the most active participants in the whole-group discussions by bringing to bear issues of *inequity, injustice, racism, sexism, oppression, irrelevance* of the curriculum to some groups of students, etc. As time went by, precisely when their conversations began to be tape recorded, they clustered together in a small group. They talked among themselves rather than voice their ideas in the whole-group conversations. Gladys was the one in this group who participated the most from a critical perspective in the whole-group conversations in the second semester. On one occasion, when teachers were talking about the 'burning questions' they have as the basis of their inquiries and reflections, Gladys questioned the roles of minority women in the educational system:

"Since it's clear that many of *us* are aware of the triple oppression (gender, race, social class), then how come *we* continue to work within and for an educational system that is not *ours*? A system that, until recently, has consciously omitted or inaccurately presented *our* voices in textbooks? A system that is dominated by male administrators and female educational assistants?"

Actually this text was part of her journal entry for that day, and she read it for the group because the staff were asking participants to think about 'burning questions'. The 'burning' and 'explosive' nature of Gladys' statements were attenuated by at least three factors: first, they were very relevant to the situation;

second, she uses questions rather than declarative statements; and third, she uses the pronouns **we**, **us**, **our** which bond her with the minority teacher-participants, but at the same time distance her from the non-minority participants.

### *The socio-constructivist voices*

These types of voices could be considered as the program trademark. Although the concepts were not completely new for the participants, the terminology was new for most of them.

The notion of social construction of knowledge was worked out in operational terms by means of a small group called a 'response group' or 'interpretive community'. Participants had to bring descriptions of what they were noticing in their classrooms to share with their interpretive community. Carole (a staff member) described the process by which teachers may be able to engage in social construction of knowledge as follows:

"If **we** can take the situation **we** are in, learn to notice what's happening in that classroom, take that information and bring it to a *group of people* who have similar knowledge and interests, and share that information, **you** will be *socially constructing new knowledge* that **you** can take back to **your** classroom, back to **your** (school) system and improve it".

Carole's description of the process of social construction of knowledge in which these teachers are expected to engage is in the form of a demonstration/demand to them. Her switch in the use of pronouns to address teachers, from **we** to **you**, indicates a change of roles from being one of them (colleagues) to distancing herself from her interlocutors using **you**, **your**, as students, and **I** as a teacher, who am demanding that you do this. In using the conditional *if* and the pronoun **we** at the beginning, she attenuates the demanding tone of her statement. In describing the process of social construction of knowledge Carole is valuing social processes such as: *sharing, response group, interpretive community, socially constructing knowledge, mutuality of support and help, sharing experiences*, etc.

This notion of social construction of knowledge began to be appropriated by this group of teachers in the ways their own frameworks allowed them to assimilate (the Piagetian concept) this new paradigm of knowledge.

Monica brought what she believed was a "good example" of how she, as a teacher, engaged in constructing knowledge with a child's parent. She narrated the story of her interaction with the child that led her to call and talk with the child's mother. "**We** started talking, and **we** starting sharing my philosophy, how **I** believe in... in equality in **my** classroom and so **we** really *constructed this knowledge base*".

Monica is really interpreting her experience in terms of the paradigm of social construction of knowledge; thus her use of the personal pronoun '**we**' implied not only that they share the situation but also are developing a joint cognitive understanding of the situation. She contrasts this joint process with the statement



of her belief in 'equality' which she indexes by using the first person 'I.'

Summing up, the types of teachers' voices, *pragmatic, multiculturalist, critical*, and *socioconstructivist*, represent old and new perspectives on education in general and on teachers' culture in particular. However, these voices were constructed and reconstructed according to the specific conditions of the situation and of the participants in the dialogues. Thus, gender, race and cultural background were playing out in the formulation, alignment with or opposition to a given perspective of participants concerning their different voices. The fact of having silenced some voices over time is evidence of the distinct maneuvers of power relationships between staff and some participants, as well as among participants, despite the apparently symmetrical power relationships. Personal pronouns used by participants indexed some of the characteristics of the dynamics of social relationship generated in the conversation and/or brought up by participants as part of their ideological and cultural background. Their predominant use of the pronoun *we* is a clear indication of group identity as teachers and as colleagues sharing specific ideologies and perspectives on education. As Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990) indicate, beside the feature of social bonding between the speaker and the interlocutors, the pronoun *we* had other functions such as the attenuation of responsibility of the speaker for what she/he said by sharing it with the interlocutors and the attenuation of control exercised by the speaker over the listeners. Another aspect of the use of *we* is the introduction of ambiguity (regarding who *we* are) which may attenuate control and diffuse responsibility. In addition to the functions of *we* that Mühlhäusler and Harré describe, sometimes *we* was used to create allies and therefore gain control over the *other* whom the speaker was trying to oppose. At other times the speaker's strategic use of *we* allowed her/him to attenuate control of his/her utterance and consequently to diminish the probability of facing disagreement. Actually, avoidance of disagreement is a distinctive characteristic of teachers' dialogues (Torres, 1995b).

### **Divergences between different voices**

Confrontation and the subsequent negotiation of perspectives among participants were quite rare in the whole-group dialogues. Most of these events occurred in the *conversation* type of dialogues. Meanwhile, episodes of divergence of perspectives between the participants and the staff were more frequent. These took place during the staff presentations and to a lesser extent in the dialogues called *reporting small-group conversations*. As a way of illustration of the perspectival dynamics in these dialogues there was selected a fragment from the longest and the most fluid *conversation* type of dialogue in this group of teachers. The analysis of the dynamics of perspectives consists of following the movements in the dialogue as a participant introduces a new topic and sets up his/her perspective, and the ways by which other participants react to the topic and perspective: accepting/taking, rejecting, reformulating the topic and the perspective already set up, or bringing in new perspectives and topics. In this analysis of the dynamics of



the dialogue, the personal pronouns teachers use indicate alignment-distancing, responsibility, 'groupiness', control, and even ambiguity.

*Context of the situation:* This conversation took place at the beginning of the second semester. Mary (01-05) (a staff member) brought up the most widely heard word at that epoch, "change", and related it to drug prevention, and specifically to the DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program. In the contextual frame for this activity called "Open Invitation", participants could reject or ignore this topic and introduce any other topic. They showed their acceptance of the topic by engaging in the discussion. This was a *conversation* type of dialogue.

#### Conversation on "DARE" program (fragment)

- 01 Mary: ... They all talked about practice of prevention programs.  
They were talking about change also.
- 02       **We need** to talk about drug prevention in schools and strategies  
for saying NO and how children need to
- 03       develop these skills. **We** have other ways of approaching this  
development of skills in schools. **We need**
- 04       to teach kids *skills*. This idea of preventing drug problems and  
other kinds of problems that are present in
- 05       **our** schools.
- 06 Martha: All of **you** talk about change and .... most of the time it's not for  
the better. In **our** neighbor-
- 07       hood, in **our community we** see a lot of change in families and  
change... in our schools but it's been for
- 08       the most part worse more often than... than better. Here, in the  
DARE program, **they** go into the class-
- 09       room for the first graders. For the most part it just sounds like a  
joke: "Say NO to drugs". Another
- 10       thing, to say no to strangers, it's usually brother, sister, friends. I  
think we need to teach the children
- 11       how to say yes and how to have some dreams and hopes. **They**  
don't know how to dream, **they** don't
- 12       know how to have hope for anything. **They** don't look ahead  
into the future anymore. **We need to give**
- 13       them some choices. **They need to say yes** too as well as say no.  
The kids know how to say no. **They**
- 14       say no all the time when **they** don't want to do anything. **They**  
know how to say no. **We** spend too much
- 15       time ah... **We need as teachers to teach 'em how to say yes and to**  
**give 'em choices**. **We** take away the
- 16       things that people want them to keep away from, but **we** don't  
give 'em things that they should turn to
- 17       either. **We need to give 'em alternatives**.
- 18 Mary: **They** must be looking for hope.

- 19 Bob: It's funny. **In my** previous school there was a huge banner for the  
 20 DARE program. **I** walked in one morning and there was this eight foot long banner and in letters  
 21 this high it said JUST SAY NO. **I** thought it was... what kind of... it really looked awfully negative  
 22 when **you** walk into **your** school and see such a big word NO! **I** wish **you** would say YES to  
 23 something. Just a stupid person, just picking on the phrase. I hope they're thinking of something more  
 24 than just the phrase.
- 24 Liz: Hopefully, **I** just want to say ONE [stressed] good thing about  
 25 the DARE program. **They** targeted my daughter's class in kindergarten. She's in fifth grade right  
 26 now. There is quite a unique thing. *The kids* are really involved. She's really, you know, behind the pro-  
 27 gram. It's in Montezuma. It's over Indian School and Carlisle. And all...
- 28 Chorus: Leena, Leena's school!
- 29 Liz: Leena's school... And basically what they're doing, since **I** work  
 30 in middle school, is starting the kids learn... teaching refusal skills, which are really important  
 31 because they feel peer pressure. It's collaborative for drugs. And... those kids don't know how to...to  
 32 use refusal... you know... refusal skills. They don't know refusal skills at all. So... it's interesting,  
 33 **I** found this interesting.
- 33 Teresa: **I** was in () and he talked about refusal skills and **we** all have to  
 34 also teach refusal *skills*. The officer there is very, very positive and students are very inter-  
 35 ested, and he has been teaching a lot of role playing of refusal skills and... and **I** feel that in **our** school it's  
 effective [a lot of talking].

Looking at this dialogue in terms of the dynamics of perspectives that teachers bring to bear, Mary (lines 01-05) invites the dialogue by setting her perspective toward drug prevention: "**We need to teach kids skills**" (03-04). This perspective is actually a commitment as a teacher: "**We need to teach...**". The pronoun **we** injects a sense of intimacy that balances somewhat the obligatory tone of her perspective. The word *skills* is key in the educational approach of this prevention program, indicating that it is the individual in whom lies the capacity to refuse to engage in drug abuse. Mary is really echoing what different speakers on educational issues were saying in that epoch.

Martha's (06-17) reaction is complex: a) Relativizing change (06-08). This is actually a subtle disagreement that becomes more obvious as we look at her use of personal pronouns. First she addresses the interlocutors with **you**, which is accentuated "*All of you*", which she opposes to **we** and **our** (neighborhood, com-

munity), excluding of course the interlocutors. b) Criticizing the negative impact of the catch phrase of the DARE program "SAY NO TO DRUGS" for the community with which she works (09-10). The use of the pronoun **they** to refer to DARE expresses pretty much her distance with regard to the program strategy. c) Stating teachers' commitments: "I think **we** *need* to teach the children how to say yes and how to have some dreams and hopes" (10-11). She is actually referring to the specific needs of the children of the community she works with: "**We** *need as teachers* to teach 'em how to say yes and to give 'em choices" (15). Martha's call to teachers to be the children's advocates is reiterative (10,12,14,16). These are really a 'display of commitments', as Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990) describe them, which are attained by **we**, a group indexical. The reiterative aspect adds force to these commitments. However, her systematic use of **we** may be seen as a way of attenuating control and consequently protecting herself from possible opposition.

Mary (18) accepts the commitment that Martha is calling for: "They (the children to whom Martha refers) must be looking for hope". Meanwhile Bob's (19-23) perspective on the DARE program is a sort of *yes/but* reaction. He agrees with Martha regarding the negative impact of the catch phrase of the program. However, he diminishes this negative impact by a self-deprecating remark: "*Just a stupid person, just picking on the phrase. I hope they're thinking of something more than just the phrase*" (22-23). The use of *just* and *stupid* as mitigators allow him to surface the positive aspects of the program. The narrative character of Bob's utterance allows him to use **I-you** where **you** really implies not his interlocutors but an indeterminate one.

Liz (24-27) defends the program, "Hopefully, I just want to say ONE (stressed) good thing about the DARE program" (24), by pointing out its positive results in her daughter's school: "There is a unique thing. The kids are really involved" (25-26). Liz' defense of the program, for which she assumes full responsibility by using the pronoun **I**, comes at a moment when there was a rise in criticism of the program. So she uses linguistic resources to disagree politely and to prevent reactions: "Hopefully" which gives a sense of possibility; "just ONE thing", stressing ONE which implies a sense of permissibility — if there are bad things, there can also be good things. In line 28 some people in the group identify the school to which Liz is referring as the school in which one of the participants (Leena) is working. Liz (29-32) aligns with the basic strategy of the program by justifying the felt need of *refusal skills*: "Teaching refusal skills which are very important because they feel peer pressure" (30).

Teresa (33-35) aligns with Liz' defense of the program on the basis of the need for refusal skills on the part of students: "**We** *all have to* also teach *refusal skills*" (33). However, like Martha (10-17) and Mary (3-4), Teresa states a commitment including the interlocutors as she uses **we**. Thus she shares responsibility and control due to the obligatory tone of her statement. She also defends the program because of its positive results in her school: "I feel in **our** school it's effective" (35). Teresa here uses **our** in an exclusive sense, to differentiate her

school from others.

So far two perspectives of the DARE program are at play: 1) The program's catchword is too negative and therefore not relevant for students of Martha's school and community; and 2) The program is effective in Liz' and Teresa's schools. Meanwhile, Mary (line 18) is acknowledging Martha's suggestion about teaching something positive also. Bob, in turn, is aligning with Martha regarding the negative impact of the phrase "Just Say NO", although he mitigates this negative aspect of the program. Unlike Martha, he does not go on to consider the differences in the impact of this phrase for different communities. In the analysis of the dynamics of perspective, personal pronouns play an important role by indexing characteristics of the social relations relevant to the situation, facilitating the understanding of the perspectives or voices at play.

At any rate, the two perspectives set up so far are really the expression of two voices: 1) the *pragmatic voice* uttered by Liz and followed by Teresa, who identify themselves with the program's basic format of 'refusal skills', connecting the program in this way with a pragmatic stance on education; and 2) the *multiculturalist voice* uttered by Martha in complaining about the lack of responsiveness of the DARE program to the specific needs of the community she is working with.

As the participants move on in the conversation, they negotiate their perspectives on the negative as well as the positive aspects of the program, and the possible explanations of those results. The discussion continues on the reasons why the program works or does not work in some communities, and the pros and cons of the program: credibility, lack of teaching skills, managerial skills, role of teachers, etc. In general terms the negotiation of their divergences is founded on the notion of *diversity*: different needs and different ways to meet those needs. Little by little *diversity* becomes the convergent point since both parties base their arguments on the issue of *diversity*: On the one hand Martha indicates the irrelevance of the program because it does not consider *diversity of needs* in the target population. On the other hand, Liz and Teresa also take *diversity* as their reason why the program is effective in their specific cases.

By analyzing the perspectival dynamics and the role of personal pronouns in indexing the ongoing configuration of the social relations constructed or reconstructed in teachers' dialogues, I was able to identify in this specific context, first of all the high use by these teachers of the pronoun **we** and the co-associated **our**, **us** for self-reference and for referring to their interlocutors. Secondly, as Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990) indicate, the pronoun **we** may index social bonding or 'groupiness', for sharing responsibility or control of the illocutionary force of the speech act, when it includes the interlocutors, while distancing from others (**they**). These authors also indicate another function of the pronoun **we**, which is not precisely indexical. In some cases **we** is used to create ambiguity and vagueness, thus it helps the speaker to attenuate responsibility and control. In this case **we** and the *other* are unspecified. In addition to these functions, teachers' strategic



use of the pronoun **we** helped them to avoid facing disagreement from the interlocutors. Finally, **we** can also be used to gain control and power to oppose the *other*. This is the case when by using **we** as self-reference, the speaker excludes his/her interlocutors or a defined group of them, to whom s/he refers as **you** or **they**. In using **we** in this strategic manner, the speaker not only gains allies but also some control over the *other*, from whom the speaker distances herself/himself.

## DISCUSSION

When this large group of teachers got together, they engaged in a *conversation*, a *discussion after a presentation*, or a *report on a small-group conversation*. These types of dialogues developed within certain frames set up by the program, the evolving characteristics of the interaction dynamics among teachers, and the specific conditions of the situation in which they took place. These three types of dialogues differ one from another in several respects: a) Agenda openness; b) Who introduced the topic, one of the participants or the staff; c) Perceived necessity of staying on the same topic; d) Role of the staff member who coordinated the meeting; and e) Structure of the interaction. Across these categories of comparison among dialogues there is the *openness* dimension that has to do with the degree of control the program held in terms of structuring the conditions in which these dialogues occurred. The more open (less external structuring), the more probable it was for participants to have a true conversation (a true dialogue in Freire's sense), talking among themselves with relatively symmetrical rights of speakership. The *conversation* type of dialogues in this study may be called, from the Freirean perspective, authentic opportunities for dialogue among teachers: authentic spaces and times for growing their genuine voices and developing their identities. *Genuine voice* seems redundant, unless we oppose this expression to that in which a teacher's voice is more a reproduction of the dominant ideology that, unawares, pervades his/her individual voice. Therefore, becoming aware of how our voices are pervaded by dominant ideologies, and in this process to discover our genuine voices, should be a primordial goal of education. 'Learning to read the word and the world' is Freire's famous sentence that states just such a goal. The necessary condition to reach this goal is to be able to engage in authentic dialogue, since "Without dialogue there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education" (Freire, 1992 [1970], p. 81).

Teachers' dialogues may be described as a 'polyphony', a "dialogical interanimation" (Volosinov, 1973, p. 95), including an individual's different voices, the voices of different participants, and the voices of the traditional theories and ideologies of education. Sometimes all those voices were so embedded one in another that it was difficult to differentiate among them. Only by doing a close examination of the use of language and its situational, institutional and societal context (using Fairclough's, 1989, 1992 levels of analysis of discourse), was it



possible to identify four types of teachers' voices: the *pragmatic voices*, the *multiculturalist voices*, the *critical voices*, and the *socio-constructivist voices*. The 'overwording' teachers used to communicate their ideas on a given educational issue was very helpful for identifying their voices. The use of many synonyms and related terms and phrases may be taken as indicator of a teacher's deepest concern, or "intense preoccupation" (Fowler & Kress, 1979, p. 211). Of course there was also information from the context of the situation and the author's own familiarity with the discourses and theories of education, that play an important role in the identification of those voices.

Although there were identified four prototypical teachers' voices, this is not to say that a given participant's voice is merely a repetition of one or more of those four voices; each participant's voice is a unique appropriation and configuration of pervading traditional voices in a specific area, as well as his/her own creation. The multi-voiced quality of an 'individual' voice is captured poetically in this well known sentence by Bakhtin (1981): "The word in language is half someone else" (p. 293). The appropriation of this word, he continues, is a matter of intentionality, accent, expressivity and adaptation: "It becomes one's own word when the speaker populates it with his [her] own intention, his [her] own accent, when he [she] appropriates the word adapting it to his [her] own semantic and expressive intention" (p. 293, brackets added). A dialogical interpretation of the relation among individual voices, group voices and the voices of tradition of thought and discourse, is that of dynamic and evolving interdependence among them; because of this interdependence they grow and change. Thus, culture and traditions influence individual and group voices. Since the influence is reciprocal and evolving, individual voices and above all group voices could change cultures and historical conditions. This is one of the main premises of critical pedagogy founded in Freire's seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1992). Similarly, Fairclough (1989, 1992) proclaims a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structures, which may transform each other depending on the access to power, including the new modalities of power in which the power of language has been enhanced. The change of social structures may be initiated as a "Critical Language Awareness" (Fairclough, 1995) to unveil the language of power and become 'empowered' by the power of language. This critical language awareness is key in the development of both individual and group voice and identity.

Gender, race and cultural background of the participants were somewhat connected to the type of predominant voice of the different subgroups configured according to these factors. In the present study, there was a quite obvious association between the race and ethnic background of the participants and the kind of voice with which they tended to be most identified: the European-American participants were more identified with the *pragmatic voices* and the 'minority' groups with the *multicultural* and/or *critical voices*. With regard to the *socio-constructivist voice*, it mostly reflected the orientation of the program, and the participants had just begun to make sense of it, except for one participant who really got the essen-

tial idea of this perspective. This association is not uncommon given the origins and history of the perspectives on education such as the *multiculturalist* or the *critical* which represent and are part of the ideology, values and struggles of the minority groups as Sleeter and McLaren (1995) point out. The *pragmatist voice*, on the other hand, is the hallmark of the European-American culture and longtime dominant ideology, which underlies apparently 'new' perspectives on education.

Something similar happened in this group regarding gender. The only two male participants in the program, from the European-American culture, were the most obviously identifiable as *pragmatic voices*. In addition, when female members of the staff were orienting an activity for the participants, often the male participants disagreed openly with the presenter or tried to criticize the activity based on minor details rather than on a comprehensive consideration of it. Since they did not do that in similar situations when the presenter or coordinator was a male staff member, and their obvious discomfort in the aforementioned situations, one could see this as a power struggle. The most common situation in the school culture is that by which the male (teacher, administrator or any position of power) is leading female teachers. The inverse roles were something 'unusual' and represented something to try to tear down. Apparently unsubstantiated disagreement and critique constituted their "counterscript", using Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson's (1995) terminology to describe the construction and configuration of relations of power in the classroom, albeit a very typical classroom.

One of the objectives of the program these teachers were attending, was to encourage and support the growing of teachers' own voices. In doing so, the staff fashioned curriculum activities aimed at that purpose. The whole-group dialogues were part of those activities. Nonetheless there were some teachers whose voices were not heard in the large-group dialogues. There were various motives and conditions which prevented teachers from participating in them. For instance, some teachers preferred to remain silent, or they did not find it worthwhile to speak in the large group, and/or they did not want to 'monopolize' time. Other teachers were simply afraid to talk in the large group. However, when one remains in silence, this does not imply that one does not have a perspective on the given matter. At any rate, raising voice or keeping silent is not only a matter of personal characteristics or will, it is also a matter of the context of the situation which privileges some voices and discourages others. As a matter of fact, the program framework, enacted by the staff, displayed and endorsed the development of the *socio-constructivist voices* and a mainstream view of the *multiculturalist voices* or perspectives on education; but discouraged the expression and development of the *critical voices* by avoiding those situations and topics (controversial and 'hot' topics such as racism or inequality) where those voices could be raised or were beginning to be heard.

The endorsement of the development of the different teachers' voices and identities implies the fashioning of opportunities to allow those voices to be expressed and also to grow, necessarily including the opportunity to examine them

critically in terms of the ideologies that underlie them. Thus teachers can determine how much they recreate or reproduce dominant ideologies and imposed identities, for example accepting without hesitation their identity as 'practitioners' as opposed to theorists or an "intellectual humorless" type of person, as referred to by one of the participants. Giroux (1988) calls for changing the teachers' role from merely 'practitioners' to also 'intellectuals'. Actually, he devotes one entire book entitled *Teachers as Intellectuals* to the elaboration of this perspective. The pervasive character of the dominant ideology and the unawareness of it by teachers facilitates their acceptance of imposed identity, diminishing thus their possibility of developing or constructing their authentic voices and identities. *Authentic* refers to the type of teacher's voice that Elbaz (1990) is advocating: "to return to teachers the right to speak for and about teaching" (p. 17); or the type of identity that Taylor (1989) is talking about. Despite the efforts of the program staff to build opportunities to allow the growth of teachers' voices, actually there was no "third space", as Gutierrez, Rymes and Larson (1995) call the classroom in which teacher and students (in their case) may engage in a true dialogue: "a place in which a Bakhtinian social heteroglossia is possible... a site where no cultural discourses are secondary" (p. 447). In the same vein, feminist 'voices' such as Belenky's *et al* (1986) study of women's development of *self*, *voice* and *mind*, and Gilligan's (1982) study on women's *moral development*, among many others, are well documented claims of women's '*distinct voices*' regarding knowledge and moral issues, which have always been ruled by male standards and their distinctiveness ignored. In Freire's terms, true dialogue implies not only equal rights and symmetrical relations of power among speakers but their engagement in 'reading the word and the world': "true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in *critical thinking*" (Freire, 1992, p. 80-81, italics added). Hence true dialogue is a necessary condition for the growing of authentic voices since these are always in a process of transformation. Therefore we constantly need to engage in an ongoing dialogue with others in order to grow: "Dialogue thus is an existential necessity" (Freire, 1992, p. 77).

At a micro level of analysis there were examined the construction and reconstruction of *voice* and *identity* along with the dynamics of the dialogue, which is constitutive of and constituted by the social relations, including power relationships. This microanalysis focused on the functions of the personal pronouns, especially the pronoun *we* (due to its high use by these teachers), as indexical of the social relations generated in the dynamics of the dialogue. As Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990) note, *we* may index social bonding or 'groupiness', sharing of responsibility and control, and also for creating ambiguity and attenuating responsibility and/or control with the interlocutors. Another function of *we* that is not contemplated by Mühlhäusler and Harré is that of gaining control or power. This happened when the speaker used *we* excluding a specific group (the listeners or a specific group of listeners such as the program staff) to whom he/she referred as *you* or *they*. In using *we*, the speaker gains power by creating some allies to op-

pose the ones s/he is criticizing. In brief, the microanalysis of the strategic use of language, such as personal pronouns in dialogue, sheds light on the situated construction of teachers' voices and identities in the dynamics of their dialogues.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Each day the awareness of the necessity and benefits of teachers' dialogues is growing, and so are their voices. However, not all teachers' talks are beneficial to them and not all their voices are authentic voices. Of the three types of whole-group dialogues identified (*conversation, discussion after a presentation and report of a small-group conversation*), the *conversation* type of dialogue, due to its openness, allowed teachers to raise their different voices or educational perspectives (*pragmatic, multiculturalist, critical and socio-constructivist*). Nonetheless, in order to have teachers' authentic voices and identities develop, it is necessary for the teacher education program to consciously foster true dialogues among teachers, including the critical examination of their voices and perspectives on education. This is needed in order to make teachers aware of their tendency to be mere reproducers of the dominant ideology despite their honesty and engagement in the education of their students.

The microanalysis of some characteristics of the language teachers used in their interaction with other teachers unveils the processes of construction and reconstruction of teachers' voices and identities in the dynamics of the dialogue, which is constituted by and constitutive of the ongoing social relations including power relationships. This microanalysis focused on the functions of the personal pronouns, especially the pronoun *we* (due to its high use by these teachers), as indexical of the social relations generated in the dynamics of the dialogue. Hence, the study of personal pronouns in teachers' dialogues sheds light on our understanding of teachers' situated construction of their voices and identities while engaging in dialogue with other teachers.

## APPENDIX: CONVENTIONS IN THE TRANSCRIPTIONS

( ): Empty parentheses indicate inaudible speech

(laughs): Words in parentheses: nonverbal utterances

Words in CAPITAL LETTERS: Raising the voice

Utterance with final rising intonation is marked with a question mark, continued intonation with a comma, and falling intonation with a period.

... Pause within an utterance

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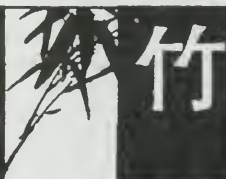
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Initiated by Professor Christopher N. Candlin and Ken Keobke, this project is supported by a grant from the Quality Enhancement Fund, City University of Hong Kong

# What do Foreign Language Learners Do in Their Academic Reading<sup>1</sup>

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*Competence in academic reading is a key component in obtaining higher degrees for foreign language learners in English medium universities. This paper summarizes research findings on academic reading obtained from a questionnaire, two sets of reading tests and a textbook analysis. Results revealed that the essential reading skills required of foreign language learners and the skills they have most problems with in their academic studies are 1) skimming; 2) reading a text or parts of a text more slowly and carefully to extract all the relevant information for a written assignment such as an essay, dissertation or examination; and 3) understanding unknown words. The correlations between reading tests which tested global skills and discrete skills were strong. The results indicated that if these learners did well on global skills, they also tended to do well on discrete skills and vice versa. Learners seemed to use their skills eclectically and holistically. The results suggest that too much emphasis in EAP reading has been given to reading for the main idea, at the cost of faster reading skills (skimming) and area-specific skills (understanding unknown words) which are required of learners and which they find most difficult.*

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Research

Of all the varied activities of foreign language teaching and learning, reading is one of the most pervasive and important skills for learners. Obtaining higher degrees in English medium universities especially involves reading of academic materials written in English. Without good reading proficiency, learners are unable to carry out their academic studies and compete with their native English-speaking counterparts. Thus, for foreign students who aim to carry out such studies in English medium universities, being able to read effectively in English is crucial.

This study was carried out in the Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Reading in 1993. Each year a considerable number of multilingual students from around the world who use English as a foreign language come to the university to study for higher degrees. A pre-session course is offered to get them prepared before starting their academic studies. Once in the real academic setting, they are asked to read as much and be as capable as their native counterparts. They are expected to continue to develop as language learners, yet with little or no instructional support in the use of the language. They are also required to read selectively, intensively and at relatively higher speeds: skills crucial to their academic success.

### Theoretical Background

In recent years, many research studies have concentrated either on the product of reading or the process of reading. However, more data needs to be collected on what reading skills are required by these learners in order to carry out their academic studies and which of these skills learners have problems with in their studies. A thorough understanding of the complex nature of academic reading skills based on data collection is essential for guiding teaching and testing of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) reading.

Reading involves employing various kinds of knowledge that readers bring to the text that they are reading. This knowledge falls roughly into three categories: linguistic knowledge, knowledge about the rhetorical structure of the text, and background knowledge concerning the content area assumed by the text passage. Reading theorists have hypothesized different models to emphasize the roles of different factors in the reading process. Several models are prominent in the area of second and foreign language acquisition and pedagogy. They are: (a) the bottom-up model (Carver, 1978; Cziko, 1978, 1980, 1981) which assumes a greater role for linguistic factors in the process of reading; (b) the psycholinguistic model (Coady, 1979) which is related to the top-down model (Goodman, 1973, 1976, 1988) in L1 reading and schema theory (Anderson & Pearson, 1988; Anderson, 1978; Pritchard, 1990; Rumelhart, 1980), emphasizing the content of a passage; and (c) the interactive model (Carrell, 1988; Carrell, Devine & Eskey, 1988; Rumelhart, 1977) which posits constant interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing. Good readers, according to this model, make effective use of both their linguistic knowledge and their knowledge of the world in decoding and interpreting the information in a text.

Many contemporary studies have been carried out within the framework of the above three models. There are two specific areas of research that are directly related to this study: a) The identifiability of the skills (Alderson, 1984b, 1990a, 1990b; Matthews, 1990; Rosenshine, 1980; Spearritt, 1972; Weir, Hughes, & Porter, 1990); and b) The question of whether FL Reading is a language problem or a reading problem (Alderson, 1984a; Carrell, 1991; Clarke, 1986, 1988; Cziko, 1978, 1980; Gamez, 1979; Hudson, 1988).

Research studies have attempted to discover whether reading is composed of different subskills that might relate to one another within a taxonomy or hierarchy of skills. There are many taxonomies that have been drawn up, varying in length from three or four skills to long lists comprising thirty or forty distinct skills as discussed in Alderson (1984a, 1984b), Matthews (1990), Munby (1978), Rosenshine (1980), and Seddon (1978).

However, there is little consensus as to the content of these taxonomies or the terminology used to describe them (Williams & Moran, 1989). Williams and Moran, in discussion of the work of Davies (1968), Davies and Widdowson (1974), Spearritt (1972) and others, observe that it may not be psychologically valid to list discrete reading skills. This is also supported by Alderson and Urquhart (1984)



who, referring to Lunzer and Gardner (1979), point out that attempts to identify skills are typically carried out through comprehension type exercises, but being able to do such exercises does not necessarily amount to reading. They go on to mention other drawbacks of the notion of skills: the concern with the product of reading rather than the process; the nature of the readers themselves and variables such as readers' purpose and motivation.

However, Williams and Moran also point out that "educators and material writers in the EFL world nevertheless have faith in the existence of such skills, and produce materials accordingly". Similarly, it has been suggested by some scholars (Carrell, Devine & Eskey, 1988, as cited in Williams & Moran, 1989) that ESL and EFL reading programs should include training in skills and strategies. These researchers find it possible to talk about distinct reading skills and feasible to help students to improve them.

Furthermore, if knowledge is required as to what FL learners are doing when they read in their academic studies, we might have to consider the process of transferring L1 reading ability into L2 or FL reading ability since reading a second or foreign language involves a transfer of both first language reading abilities and their second or foreign language proficiency into the second or foreign language (Clarke & Silberstein, 1979; Carrell, 1988; Alderson, 1984b; Hudson, 1988). This above issue has been a matter of debate for some time. Some researchers (Jolly 1978; Coady, 1979) have argued that reading in a second language depends crucially upon reading ability in one's first language rather than upon one's level of ability in the second language.

According to this view, students who read poorly in the second language do so either because they do not possess good reading skills in their L1, or because they fail to transfer them. Once learners have matured in their ability to read in the first language, such reading skills may need to be relearned in the L2 or FL (Rigg, 1988; Gamez, 1979). However, other researchers have argued that reading ability in a second language appears to be largely a function of proficiency in that language, or at least some minimal threshold of proficiency needs to be attained in that language before good readers' first language reading strategies can be transferred to reading in an L2 or FL (Clarke & Silberstein, 1979; Carrell, 1988; Cziko, 1980; Devine, Carrell, & Eskey, 1987). This is the 'language threshold' or 'language ceiling' or 'short-circuit hypothesis' of second language reading. According to Carrell (1991), through his research hypothesis (L2 reading equals L1 reading ability combined with L2 language proficiency), both first language reading ability and second language proficiency have significant effects on second language reading ability.

### **The Present Study**

The present study presupposes the existence of the reading skills mentioned above. I aim to find out what reading skills are most frequently required by learners in their academic studies and what reading problems learners have when



pursuing their higher degrees. If it is a reading problem, what essential skills are involved? If it is a language problem, what major problems do they have? Or if it is a combined problem of L1 reading and L2 or FL proficiency (Carrell, 1991), we would like to know what the most important reading problems are in learners' academic studies and what their existing language problems in L2 proficiency are. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What reading skills do learners feel are essential and what reading skills do learners feel they have most problems with in their academic studies?
- 2) How is test performance on global reading skills related to test performance on discrete skills?
- 3) What is the relative balance of reading tasks and skills developed in the pre-sessional reading textbook designed to help learners cope with their academic studies?

## METHOD

This study was designed as a multi-method descriptive and analytic study, which employed a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods, including a questionnaire, two sets of reading tests and a reading task analysis.

### Subjects

The subjects for the survey study were learners from a range of cultural, educational and specialist backgrounds. Questionnaires were issued to 120 those students who had been enrolled in the pre-sessional course in 1992 and who were still studying at the University of Reading at the time of the research. By that time, they had already finished the pre-sessional course and had already been following their academic studies for more than seven months. They knew exactly what reading skills had been required of them through their own experiences and the difficulties they had had in their academic reading.

Forty-eight similar subjects who came to Reading for the pre-sessional course in July 1993 were issued with two sets of reading tests testing global and discrete skills. The nature of their reading needs would be the same as the above group of students. However, they knew relatively little of what would be expected of them in their academic reading. Test results showed their general entrance level of reading proficiency and their performance on different levels of reading skills.

Four EFL teachers teaching the pre-sessional course were asked to analyze each reading task in the textbook and identify its main focus in terms of the reading skills that the task developed. The purpose of the analysis was to get a clear picture of the overall balance of skills developed through the reading tasks designed in the textbook.

## Data Collection Procedures

### *Questionnaire*

A questionnaire (see Appendix I) was designed to follow the pre-sessional reading course at the University of Reading to provide an indication for further needs analysis and evaluation. It aimed to collect data from the learners' points of view about both the essential reading skills that they find important and skills that they find difficult within their academic studies. It also would explore whether the skills learners perceive as important were necessarily perceived as difficult in their academic studies.

The initial stage of the questionnaire design was to analyze the reading process and identify the enabling skills which are necessary for successful performance in the target situation. This was used to establish a taxonomy of reading skills in the academic context drawn from the work of Munby (1978), Weir (1993, 1988, 1983), and Hughes (1988). The second stage was to identify the types of texts learners read in their subject areas by conducting informal interviews with those learners and their subject lecturers. However, as the preliminary results were in accordance with previous work done by Weir (1993) and Hughes (1988), this text analysis was eliminated from the questionnaire. The final stage was to decide on the importance and difficulty category scales on a 4-point likert scale. The specified reading skills in the questionnaire would thus form the basis for the investigation into EAP reading. The results from the survey would then form the subsequent criteria for evaluation of the content and construct validation of the teaching and the testing of reading in an EAP context.

### *Reading Tests*

The reading tests used in this study consisted of one TEEP (Testing of English for Educational Purposes) test and two gap filling tests. All were designed and validated over several years in CALS at the University of Reading. The TEEP test consists of two parts. Part A tests learners' abilities to get main ideas and major supporting details in a reasonably short time. Part B tests reading thoroughly to understand specific structure and lexical items. The two gap filling tests test skills similar to Part B of the TEEP test.

### *Reading Task Analysis*

A pro forma of reading task analysis of the pre-sessional textbook was designed on the basis of the four major reading skills in the questionnaire. Three

5. Pre-reading activities: Predicting and surveying, which involve quickly looking through a book, a chapter of a book, article of a journal, etc., to decide whether or not it is suitable for your purpose.
6. Follow-up activities leading to writing.
7. Understanding structure at the sentence level (within and between).

**Table 1: Three Reading Skills Additional to Those in the Questionnaire**

other reading skills have been added to the analysis to avoid oversimplifying the teaching situation. They were as shown in Table 1.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The questionnaire was analyzed to obtain a clear picture of the skills that learners feel essential and the skills that learners found problems with in their academic studies. Cross tabulations were done to find out the implicational relationships between skills learners regarded as important and as difficult. Of the 120 questionnaires issued by internal mail within the University of Reading, 63 respondents were included in the study. Later respondents were not included due to the time pressure of the research. The fact that the majority of the students were working toward completing their masters at the time of the survey might also have contributed to the low return rate. However, the respondents represented a wide range of learners' subject areas and were representative of the international students at the university. Quantitative data were coded and analyzed according to the ratings given by the learners on the importance and difficulty scales for the reading skills.

Qualitative data from the two open-ended questions in the questionnaire were classified and categorized into the major areas of problems the learners encountered in their academic reading. Both qualitative and quantitative data from the survey facilitated an understanding of the substance and meaning of EAP reading.

Test results were analyzed using SAS<sup>2</sup> to find out whether or not there was a relationship among tests which tested different skills. Correlations were carried out on the different sub-tests to find out the correlation between 1) Part A and Part B of the TEEP test and 2) Part A of the TEEP test and the two gap-filling tests. The test results showing the relationships between these tests would provide feedback to EAP teaching from the point of view of testing.

The Pro forma for textbook analysis was analyzed to discover the relative balance between reading tasks and reading skills designed in the pre-sessional textbook. This part of the results would provide information from the point of view of teaching material in the EAP context.

## **RESULTS**

### *Questionnaire*

#### *Quantitative data*

A descriptive analysis of the data was first carried out to explore how learners perceived the reading skills under each category from 1 to 4 on the importance and difficulty scales (see Appendix 1 and Table 2).

Figure 1 was created by combining the two highest ratings on the importance and difficulty scales. Results in the fourth category (Not Sure) are treated as missing data. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the reading skills that learners perceived as important and the skills that learners perceived as difficult. It can be observed that learners tended to grade the skills higher on the importance scale

Variables	Valid Cases	Means	Standard Deviation	Very Important	Important	Not Important
Skimming	62	1.52	.57	51.6%	45.2%	3.2%
Scanning	60	1.68	.70	45.0%	41.7%	13.3%
Main ideas	60	1.48	.65	60.0%	31.7%	8.3%
Vocabulary	56	2.01	.59	16.1%	66.1%	17.9%
Variables	Valid Cases	Means	Standard Deviation	Very Difficult	Difficult	Not Difficult
Skimming	57	2.53	.57	3.5%	40.4%	56.1%
Scanning	58	2.62	.59	5.2%	27.6%	67.2%
Main Ideas	55	2.33	.72	14.5%	38.2%	47.3%
Vocabulary	52	2.17	.68	15.4%	51.9%	32.7%

Table 2 Description of the Quantitative Data

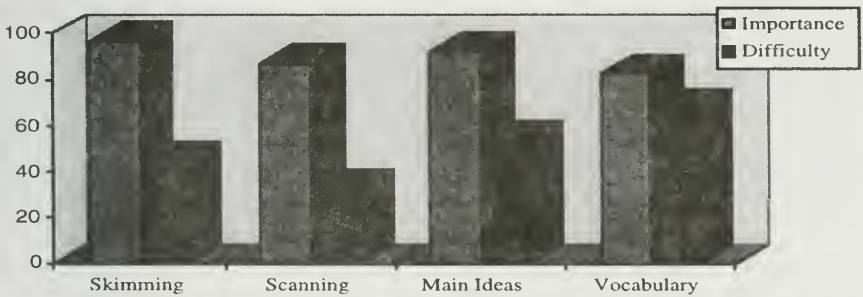


Figure 1: Percentage of learners who considered each skill important or difficult

than on the difficulty scale. The reasons for this, however, could not be explained through the questionnaire results.

### Qualitative Data

The following qualitative results were obtained from the two open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The results were summarized into the following four major categories. Quoted words are in learners' verbatim form.

**Understanding unknown words.** Of all the responses, 26 learners, slightly more than one third of the respondents, mentioned that understanding unknown words was the skill they had the most problem with and which was crucial in their studies.

In the last exam, I found unknown words in an exam question and hence I could not choose the question.

My main problem is when I find an important word in a text and I don't know the meaning, and probably without that word you [I] can not understand the text."

**Reading speed.** Another one third of the subjects (21 students in all) regarded reading speed as something that caused difficulties in their academic reading, which was in conflict with thorough understanding of a text. Learners complained that they simply could not read fast enough, yet there was an urgent need to get a large amount of information through reading in their academic studies. One learner described his experience in the following way.

The most important is to read in depth which is crucially required in my discipline. The problem is I still have a problem in reading speed. I normally take an incredible long time to read through a long passage that the speed in reading sociological text is not relevant to good reading. It is sure that I can get much information by skimming and scanning, but it is unlikely to help me to understand.

**Reading academic texts.** Eighteen students in the survey reported that their problems in reading were due to the lack of training in reading in their specialized areas. They commented that the pre-session course should have provided them with extra help in reading academic texts in their own areas.

If they (CALS) provide such reading materials that are very close to each student's field of future study, it could be more helpful. The pre-session reading course is helpful for improving one's general reading skill, but in the case of academic reading, it seems to me that to learn as many words related to one's own study field as possible would be more important than to learn skimming and scanning skills.

There is, therefore the need for an individual pursuing the pre-session reading course to be exposed to some technical text relevant to his/her area of specialization. Material for reading practice should be relevant to an individual course of specialization.

**Reading for overall comprehension.** Sixteen students, about a quarter of the subjects, mentioned that they had difficulties in understanding text organization and writer's attitude. They commented:

Difficulty in understanding the writer's attitude towards the argument she or he makes. Whether the writer is agreeing, disagreeing, supporting or convincing the reader with his or her view.

The results further showed that understanding the complex nature of academic text requires not only a knowledge of grammar but also an understanding of the ideas embedded within the reasoning used in the academic texts.



## Reading Tests

Two sets of reading tests were issued to 48 students at the beginning of their pre-session course. The aim of these tests was to find out the students' level of proficiency in different reading skills and the possible relationships between tests of different skills. Correlations were carried out to discover the relationships between these tests. Results in Figures 2a, 2b & 3 below show the relationships between testing of global and discrete skills

It can be seen that the correlations between the global skills test and the three tests of discrete skills are 0.5743, 0.7426 and 0.7069 ( $P < 0.01$ ). The correlations for the testing of global skills and testing of discrete skills are strong and directly proportional. If the learners did well on the testing of global skills, they also tended to do well on the testing of discrete skills and vice versa. The results also indicate that the two sets of tests that are designed to test global skills and discrete skills separately might have actually tested similar reading skills.

## Reading Task Analysis

A reading task analysis was done of the textbook *Reading* (McGovern, Matthews, & Mackay, 1994), which is assigned for the pre-session course. This textbook consists of seven units. There are altogether 103 tasks in the whole textbook. The analysis was carried out by four ELT teachers through a pro forma matching form. The analysis consisted of two parts: 1) a descriptive analysis (by the teachers) of frequency of reading skills developed through all 103 reading

**Fig 2a Relationship between Part A of TEEP  
Test and Gap Filling One**

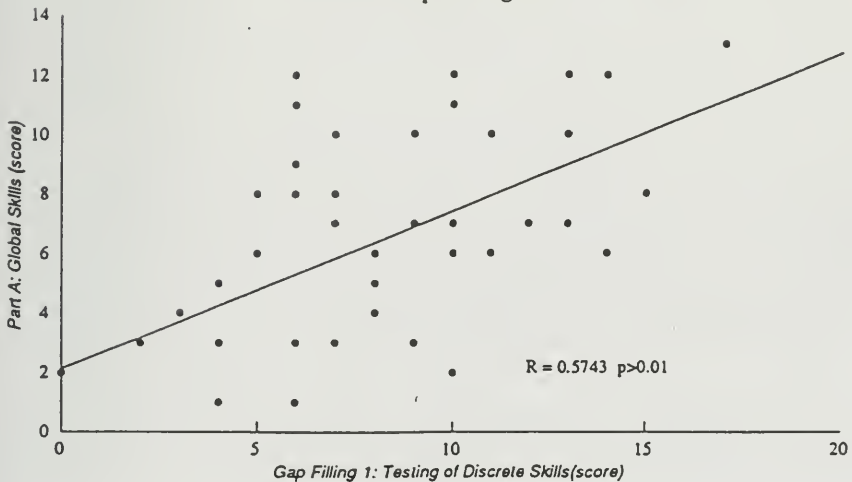


Fig 2b Relationship between Part A of TEEP Test and Gap Filling Two

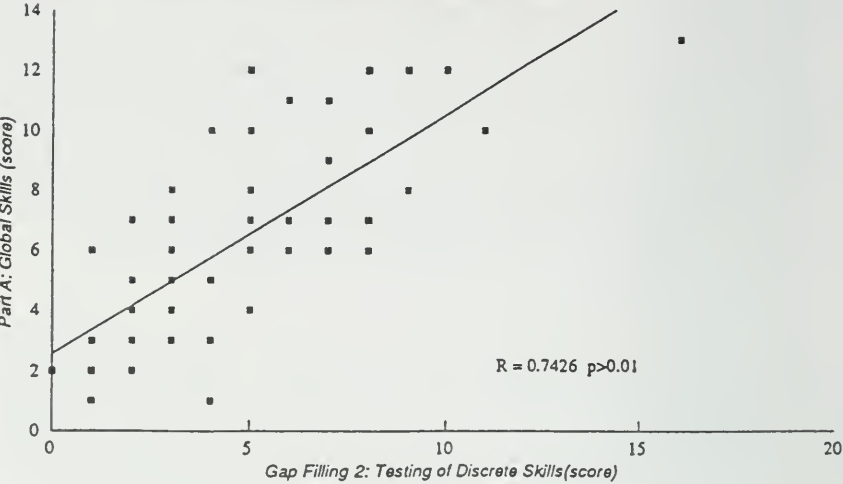
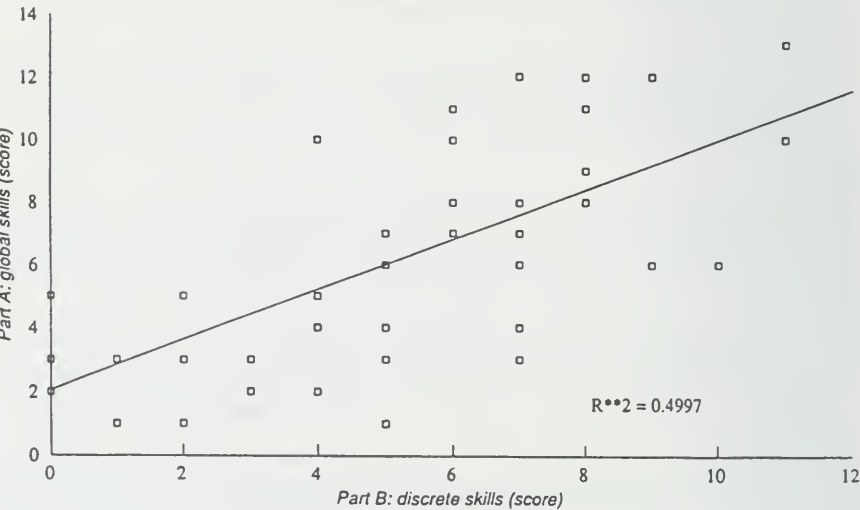


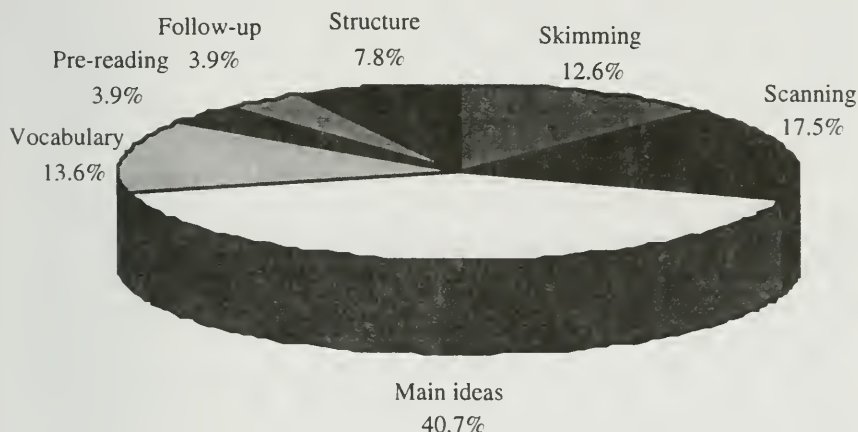
Fig 3 Relationship between Testing of Part A and Part B



	Skim- ming	Scan- ning	Main Ideas	Vocab- ulary	Pre- reading	Follow-up to writing	Structure
Tasks	13	18	42	14	4	4	8
Percent	12.6%	7.5%	40.7%	13.6%	3.9%	3.9%	7.8%

**Table 3: Percentage of total tasks which develop each skill**

tasks presented in the textbook; and 2) the teachers' degree of agreement on the analysis. Table 3 above shows the number of tasks in the textbook which teachers described as devoted to each skill (numbers were attained by averaging teachers' responses).



**Figure 4: Skills developed through the tasks in the textbook**

Figure 4 above shows that, according to teachers' descriptions, reading for the 'main idea' (reading a text or parts of a text more slowly and carefully to extract all the relevant information) was developed by 40.7% of all the tasks in the textbook. The other three main reading skills in the study were practised in a similar number of tasks (44% altogether). As can be seen from the figure above, teachers found that pre-reading activities and follow-up activities to writing were practised the least through these activities.

The second part of the analysis showed there was a general consensus among the teachers who did the textbook analysis regarding discrimination of separate skills developed through each task. The results showed that of the 103 reading

tasks in the textbook, the four teachers reached total agreement on the analysis of 47 % of the tasks. Three of the teachers agreed with each other on 21% of the tasks. Thus general consensus was reached among teachers on 68% of the analysis. Teachers' opinions differed over the rest of the tasks as to which skills were developed through which reading tasks.

## DISCUSSION

### **Learners' Perceptions of the Essential Reading Skills Required of Them and the Skills They Find Most Problems with in Their Academic Studies**

The questionnaire results in Table 2 & Figure 1 reveal both the skills learners perceived as important and the skills they perceived as difficult. However, the essential reading skills were not necessarily rated in the same order on the importance and difficulty scales. They are not proportional. According to Figure 1 on the importance and difficulty scale, *skimming* came highest on the importance scale, while it was the third lowest on the difficulty scale. The skill of *main ideas* was the second highest on both the importance and difficulty scale indicating a general agreement among learners' perceptions toward this skill. *Scanning* was relatively important (similar to the skill of *vocabulary*), yet certainly rated as much less difficult (lowest on the difficulty scale). The least important skill (*vocabulary*) came the highest on the difficulty scale.

It can be seen from the above results that the academic reading skills learners perceive as essential are *skimming*, followed by *main ideas*. These learners, facing a massive amount of information to process in their academic studies, are required to read selectively by applying the skill of *skimming*. It is crucial for both native speaking learners and non-native speaking learners in the academic setting to read widely about their subjects in order to carry out their research. However, there is always a conflict of time and the ability to search for the necessary information. Learners are often at a loss with a large amount of written information to read in order to find the information they need. Therefore, both *skimming* and efficient reading for *main ideas* are important study skills for learners in the EAP context.

Although the skill of *understanding unknown words* was perceived as the least important among other skills by the learners, learners commented that *vocabulary* caused difficulty in their academic reading according to the qualitative data. Two possible reasons for this difficulty might be, firstly, for non-native learners who learned English as a foreign language, English has not been their medium of instruction in most cases. Their proficiency is not at a level which allows them to cope with their academic studies in English as comfortably as in their native languages. It requires quite a long time and effort for these adult learners to achieve the same level of proficiency as in their native languages. Therefore, reading at this stage is a language problem especially in terms of having a large stock of vocabulary.

Secondly, the difficulty with subject-specific terminology is another big problem for these learners pursuing higher degrees. Terminology for them is not simply a language problem but also a problem related to their subject studies. The nature of their academic studies requires them to know the words with relatively common meanings and with specialized meanings in their particular areas as well. To some extent, the more they knew about their subject areas, the fewer difficulties they would have with terminology. However, it is not clear from the survey results how far it is a language problem and how far it is a problem of their subject studies. The degree of difficulties in academic reading certainly differs between learners of different proficiencies.

### **Learners' Performance on Tests Which Test Different Reading Skills**

The strong and directly proportional relationships between the tests of global and discrete skills indicate that students' performance on both sets of the tests were correlated. There is a general tendency for students who did well on the global skills to do well on the discrete skills as well. These results suggest that students use their skills eclectically and holistically when tackling reading skills during the tests and applying discrete skills to handle global reading tasks. On the other hand, there is no clear indication that these two sets of tests are testing different reading skills. From the point of view of testing reading, discrete and global skills seem to be developed simultaneously.

### **Textbook Analysis of the Balance of Reading Tasks and Skills**

The fact that there were almost as many tasks aimed at developing *main idea* skills as there were tasks to develop the skills of *skimming*, *scanning* and *vocabulary* put together suggests that there might be a gap between what the material writers and teachers provide students with and what the students are really in need of. As can be seen from the above results (see Figure 1), skimming was rated as important by more learners than any other skill.

On the other hand, the skill of *understanding unknown words* was practised in one third as many reading tasks (13.6% compared with 40.7% of the tasks) as those related to finding the 'main idea' (see Table 3). Yet understanding unknown words was the skill learners rated as most difficult in their academic reading. Therefore, the balance of skill training might be better shifted more toward the training of fast and selective reading such as *skimming* and to the study of the *vocabulary* used in more specialized texts to help learners become familiar with the terminology of their subject areas.

There appeared to be a general agreement among the four teachers upon which reading task was designed to practice which particular skills. From the teachers' point of view, therefore, these reading skills are separate, divisible and identifiable and can be taught through different kinds of reading tasks. Learners, according to these teachers, can benefit from practicing certain skills by doing relevant tasks. Nevertheless, those skills from which students feel they could most benefit



(*skimming* and *understanding unknown words*) are not those skills which their textbook primarily addresses (*main idea*). These results suggest that too much emphasis in EAP reading has been given to reading for the *main idea*, at the cost of faster reading skills (*skimming*) and area-specific skills (*understanding unknown words*) which are required of learners and which they find most difficult.

## CONCLUSION

The continuing importance of the reading sub-skills has been considered in this study. They are considered from the perspectives of learners, teaching materials and test design in the EAP context. Synthesizing all three sources of data, we can conclude tentatively that the distinction between separate, divisible, and identifiable reading skills is useful from the perspectives of teaching, learning, and materials writing. It is not suggested that these subskills 'exist' in any tangible way, but rather that they represent a useful construct with which teachers may work.

Teachers and testers, and others involved in EAP teaching and learning, certainly need something concrete in the concept of reading skills to rely on, from which they could embark on syllabus design, teaching, material writing and test construction. Results from this study show that separate skills did exist in learners' minds, and while teachers were not in 100% agreement in defining any particular skills as being related to certain reading tasks, they did reach general consensus (68%) as to which skill was being practised by which task in the textbook analysis.

The testing situation, however, was more complicated. It is not clear from the test results that these subskills exist. The test results showed that testing of global skills and discrete skills were strongly correlated and proportional. This indicates that testing of learners either on global skills or on discrete skills would produce similar results (see Figures 2a, 2b & 3). What we know from the results is that the tests in this study tested overlapping reading skills. As is true in most testing situations, learners tend to refer to any skills and employ any available test taking strategies to achieve high scores. This might be different from their everyday academic reading since reading in an academic context is more purposeful and selective.

Therefore, the first step in designing a reading course and a reading test in such an EAP context would have to involve the construct we would like to teach and test. It then requires a reference not only to reading theories but to the needs analysis from all possible sources. These sources should include opinions from the learners, language teachers, and subject lecturers in the related academic areas. It is then necessary to make it a priority that the skill specifications prepared at the design stage adequately reflect the domain of reading that would be required of learners in their academic studies; this is the domain that we should teach and test.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Many people have contributed greatly to the project at the University of Reading. My special thanks go to Dr. Cyril Weir, who supervised the project. I would also like to show my sincere appreciation to Dr. Peter Falvey and Dr. Andy Curtis for the final completion of the report.

<sup>2</sup> SAS stands for Statistical Analysis System - a software system for data analysis.

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## APPENDIX I

### Reading Skills Questionnaire

Dear colleague,

We want to establish (1) what the most important reading skills for your course are and (2) the difficulties you *still* have in reading. To help us, please fill out this short questionnaire according to your own experience after the pre-sessional reading course last year. *All information will be treated in the strictest confidence*. Please send the questionnaire back through the internal mail in the envelope provided *as soon as possible*. Thank you very much for your help.

Your department \_\_\_\_\_ Your course \_\_\_\_\_

(questionnaire continued on following page)

**Part I** Please think about the reading skills required in the course you study.

1. Please tick in the boxes below  
how important it was for you  
to perform each skill

1= Very Important  
2= Important  
3= Not Important  
N= Not Sure

2. Please tick in the boxes below  
how difficult it was for you  
to perform each skill

1= Very Difficult  
2= Difficult  
3= Not difficult  
N= Not Sure

1	2	3	N	Reading Skills	1	2	3	N
				1. Skimming: reading a text quickly in order to establish a general idea of the content, e.g. to determine what part, or whether part or whole, is relevant to an established purpose and should be read again more carefully.				
				2. Scanning: looking through a text quickly in order to locate specific information, e.g., to check a date, a figure in a graph or a key word in the text.				
				3. Reading a text or parts of a text more slowly and carefully to extract all the relevant information, e.g., to carry out a written assignment such as an essay, dissertation or examination.				
				4. Understanding unknown words in the text.				
				Please specify any other important reading skills you use.				
				5.				
				6.				

**Part II** Please answer the following questions according to your own experience.

1. Please describe the main problems you *still* have in your academic reading.
2. Do you think the pre-sessional reading course can be improved to prepare you better for your academic reading? Please tick Yes [ ] No [ ]

If Yes, Please explain how.

**Liying Cheng** is a doctoral candidate at the University of Hong Kong. Her research addresses the influence of public examinations on classroom teaching and learning. She is currently collaborating on a comparative study of teachers' practices and their beliefs about assessment principles and practices.



# Some Issues in Analyzing Classroom Interaction: An Interview with Deborah Poole

**David Olsher**

*University of California, Los Angeles*

## PROFILE

Deborah Poole is an Associate Professor in the departments of Linguistics & Oriental Languages and Rhetoric & Writing Studies at San Diego State University. She began researching the discourse of classrooms while earning her Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics at the University of Southern California and has studied both junior high school social studies classes and ESL classrooms at the university level. Her work on the junior high classes has focused on testing and test review activities, including the ways test performance affects the interactional differentiation of students, and the view of knowledge which is constructed and displayed in testing events. Her work on ESL classrooms has explored the ways the talk of many ESL teachers in the U.S. is similar to the language used by middle class American caregivers. Her current interests include the interaction of speaking and writing in classroom literacy events, and classroom discourse patterns in non-English speaking environments. In the last several years she has also been actively involved in the area of intersegmental articulation (i.e., the continuity between segments of public high-school, adult school, community college, and state university) as it affects the English language learners of California.

## INTRODUCTION

This interview explores the research paradigms Dr. Poole has found useful in her research of classroom discourse as well as her insights into cross-cultural classroom interaction and the differences between L1 and L2 classrooms. Dr. Poole discusses her current interest in using the notion of the literacy event for understanding the interdependence of spoken language and written texts in classroom discourse. Dr. Poole also discusses the need for close interactional study of ESL classrooms as well as non-English medium classrooms across a variety of cultures.

## INTERVIEW

*Olsher: You've done a lot of research in language classrooms and drawn on various literature of classroom research, discourse analysis, and anthropology. Can you comment on the way you draw from various research paradigms?*

Poole: I think that probably the framework that I use for any particular study has to come from the data itself or from whatever purposes I have for looking at a given set of data. And my primary questions are educational ones and not linguistic ones. I'm interested in the kinds of social phenomena that are going on in the classrooms; I'm interested in the learning that's going on and the teaching that's going on, so those kinds of questions drive me to a certain research paradigm. Having said that, I have found the notion of a speech event to be particularly useful because, for one thing, if you look at classroom data you see that classes are organized into identifiable units that fit very well within a speech event paradigm. In most classrooms you find one event after the other, so the speech event paradigm gives you a framework for looking at what's going on and acknowledges that any kind of social situation is fraught with complexity, so that you've got to take account of the different layers and dimensions of what's going on.

Olsher: *One thing I've found interesting in your work is the way you take up the traditional IRE [initiation - response - evaluation] structure that has been written about so much and you then look at it in a speech event frame. That seems to have been very fruitful in your work.*

Poole: Yes, it's based a lot on Mehan's (1979) work on the hierarchical and sequential organization of interaction in lessons, so what I want to do in the classroom or what I have done is to take an event and then look at the organization of interaction within that event, which then provides a frame for comparing multiple instances of the same event or comparing event A to event B, and so on.

Olsher: *Do you look for what's driving the organization?*

Poole: First I usually look at how it's organized and then from that maybe move to other dimensions. Another thing that the speech event framework offers is the notion of goal. That's been one of my real interests in speech events. Duranti writes — in the *Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Discourse* (1985) — about ends or goals and the notion that events can have individual goals and societal goals. I think that we can analyze the language in depth, and that's one of the ways that we can access the societal goals of an event. That's what I found in my work on testing. When I've presented my testing study to teachers, I've found a resistance where people say "no, nobody goes over a test in order to separate the students from each other. People go over a test so that students will learn what they missed." I think that's a classic example of the difference between societal and individual goals — as a teacher when you go over a graded test, you go into that activity with the idea that you are going to help students or assist students in learning what they didn't learn before the test, but there's this other mechanism at work at the same time. I guess what I'm getting at is that we have underlying goals driving us through the kinds of events that we engage in and the classroom is no exception.

These kinds of underlying societal goals are going to be evidenced through the language that we use and not just the sequence or organization, but all dimensions of language, so we might see them in the grammar as well.

Olsher: *What did your analysis of the 'going over the test' activity reveal?*

Poole: I suggested that when teachers give back and go over a test one of the things that happens is the differentiation of students based on their grades. This gets accomplished through different kinds of interactional and linguistic mechanisms which seem to ensure that there's a pecking order, and that all the students know or can figure out what their place is within that pecking order.

Olsher: *One thing I find interesting in the paper you did on Language Socialization and the ESL classroom as well as the work on testing is the way in which cultural values are found in the details of an interaction, and yet these cultural or social values may not exist on the level of conscious awareness for the participants.*

Poole: I am certainly not the only person to say that. I think it goes along with the notion of a hidden curriculum, that there are social factors beyond the participants in a given classroom that affect the interaction and they stem from the school context and the wider school system. There are values and expectations from that wider context that get played out interactionally or linguistically.

Olsher: *I guess what you've done is you've shown through detailed discourse analysis how these social values are evidenced in the actual talk.*

Poole: I've tried to. I mean I've said that I draw from the notion of a speech event which goes to the issue that events are evidence of how cultures organize experience. So it's interesting to look at how the school culture organizes its experience into classroom events, which by the way can virtually all be considered literacy events. Then within that, I've also drawn heavily from language socialization theory. Sometimes that's been integrated with the speech event framework in my work and other times its been to some extent independent, though I don't really see them as separable. With language socialization what I've been interested in is looking at the details of interaction for evidence of how values and beliefs are displayed to students or how there is a demand that students interact in a way that's consistent with whatever the values of the wider culture are.

Olsher: *So one thing going on in the classroom is students are being socialized into some aspect of the broader culture?*

Poole: Yes, and I've looked particularly at asymmetry and at the process of social-

ization into a view of knowledge. Can I say one more thing about research paradigms? I think it's important for us as applied linguists to be open to a range of approaches to language analysis. It depends what our purpose is, but if my purpose is to understand educational contexts better, then I want to draw from approaches and methods that are going to have enough flexibility for me to answer the different kinds of questions that I have. So I want to be open to analyzing some feature of the grammar as well as how the interaction is organized. For example, I've done a paper on classroom openings where I primarily considered the grammar and how it helped constitute the asymmetry between students and teacher. As an applied linguist, my goal is to bring my linguistic training to bare on a given kind of situation. I mean, grammatical analysis is not going to answer every question, and sequential analysis is not going to answer every question, so I feel that if we are trained in linguistics and language-related disciplines, we have a range of tools for illuminating the kinds of situations that we look at.

*Olsher: This brings up another question. To what extent have your research questions come out of the actual data?*

Poole: Almost exclusively. When I started working on the testing data, I had no intention actually of looking at the activity of 'going over the test,' but I was drawn to it by its very routine nature. It seemed so ordinary and so familiar to me, and the more I got into it the more interesting it became. Then from that I did go out and collect more examples of the same kind of event, and it became imperative to use the speech event paradigm. Eventually that led me into considering it as a literacy event.

*Olsher: So this grew out of the data collection and reviewing the data you found?*

Poole: Yes, and the same is true with the language socialization in the second language classroom material. I didn't initially think of it in those terms. This is also how I work when I guide students in their research: I read the data first. Let me give you an example — I was working with a Korean student last year who had some data collected in a Saturday school for Korean students. Originally I thought she could do a study that looked at the organization of talk and compare it to data from the US. Then when I looked at it, I found the teacher was saying things like "Come and sit close to me. Teacher really misses you during the week" and "Don't talk to so and so because teacher's so lonely without you." It struck me as a language of intimacy. She ended up doing the study on language socialization and looking at the teacher role and the juxtaposition of formality and intimacy, which seems contradictory in our society, but it was right there in the data.

*Olsher: You mentioned earlier that the activity of going over a test which you've studied can be considered a literacy event. I wonder if you could comment on the role of written texts in classroom interactions.*



Poole: Well, I think it's a pervasive role and that most of the events you could look at in a classroom you would find to be literacy events. I take that term from Heath (1982). She defined literacy events as any activity where a text is critical to the interactions or interpretations of the participants. In essence what she's talking about is that people use texts as a party to their interactions and so there's some way in which spoken language and written language are interacting. If you go into a classroom from that perspective, you realize — and this goes back to your very first question about paradigms — you realize that virtually every activity, everything that goes on has some kind of print that's connected with the interaction. Maybe the teacher's writing on the board. Maybe the students are looking at a text book. Maybe they're looking at a worksheet. Maybe they're writing something in response to what the teacher is saying, but there's this constant interplay between speaking and writing. In almost any of these kinds of lessons or activities, you'll see that there's a way the text connects with the talk.

Olsher: *How does this fit with other views of classroom discourse?*

Poole: In Mehan's original account he looks at IREs as being grouped into what he calls 'topically related sets'. In other words, these aren't just ongoing sequences of IREs, but they tend to occur in topical clusters, and the more I look at data, the more it seems to me that topically related sets are tied to texts, that the topic is often connected in some way to something that's part of a text. A topically related set could occur around a vocabulary item, or an item number on a worksheet, or a paragraph in a story, so I think that you can look at how talk and texts interact in a way that sort of maps onto Mehan's original account. For example, in the test review — and I've seen other kinds of activities where this works the same way — as the interaction becomes progressively more embedded, the talk is progressively more controlled by the text. By the time you get to an IRE sequence often you have propositional content determined by the text, so that what you are allowed to say is in a sense driven by the text. I think you can look at a lot of classroom events where the text determines what this pool of allowable topics is going to be. Maybe a more general way to say it is that some interaction is organized by texts.

Olsher: *You seem to be saying that classroom activities we don't normally think of as reading or writing, things we might think of as discussion, still could be found to be driven and constrained by texts.*

Poole: Potentially. In looking at classroom interaction, much research has privileged speaking even though we know that classrooms in a sense privilege texts. I am interested in the kind of linguistic analysis that can look at the connection between spoken interaction and written texts. One of the things I've looked at is reference, interactional reference to the text. It's a potential pitfall and a potential



source of lots of repair, where students don't exactly understand what part of the text the teacher's referring to. What goes on in literacy events is that through talking — through interaction — we're referring to some part of the text. It could be a word, a paragraph, an item number, or it can be something like "letter A," but when you look at the way participants actually refer to written texts, you find it's not always clear. Through the data you see that it's not always clear that participants are following what the others are saying when they're referring, yet so many activities are structured around written texts of all different sorts.

Olsher: *Can you say more about how activities are driven by texts?*

Poole: There is a study by Richard Frankel (1990) of poison control center emergency calls. The person who worked for the center had to fill out a form that, so there would be a time lag of several minutes before the caller actually got the information he or she needed. Frankel didn't write about this as a literacy event, but it's a similar kind of phenomenon. I think we have all kinds of interactions where we have texts that in a sense drive our actions, but they're really prevalent in schools. If you think of it in a larger sense, the text is determining our activity, sort of specifying in advance what we are allowed to do, what topics are allowed.

Olsher: *As opposed to ordinary conversation?*

Poole: Yes, and what's been interesting to me is that in lots of these literacy events you don't have anything that would look like topic continuity if you took it out of the classroom setting, but everybody behaves as though it's perfectly continuous because you let the text constitute the continuity. In other words, we've gone from item one to item two to item three, and because it's listed that way on the text, that counts as creating that connection between the topics. It looks fine to abruptly shift from one to the next. Participants don't show any evidence that there's any kind of disjuncture.

Olsher: *It sounds like one thing you're moving toward is a conception of classroom discourse as unfolding on more than one channel of communication.*

Poole: Right, and that brings up the issue of processing and processing constraints. To participate and fully comprehend what's going on, you've got to be taking language in through both channels at the same time and following the links between the spoken and the written.

Olsher: *To some extent, what you're saying sounds like a re-definition of what interaction is in a classroom. Texts being the assumed dimension of what's going on that is crucial to much of the interaction.*

Poole: I hadn't thought of it that way, but even when I look back at Mehan's work, I look at the lessons that he analyzes and it looks to me as though most of them are

interconnected in this way I'm talking about in terms of written texts. This goes back to Scribner & Cole (1981) and Heath (1982). Fifteen or more years ago they were saying we need to look at literacy in context to see what people really do with it. To me if you take discourse analysis or interactional analysis and make the text and talk part of what you look at — that's a way to really get at what it is we're doing with literacy in the classroom. I think we have some very idealistic assumptions about what we're doing with reading and writing, that we're reading continuous texts and writing continuous texts, but I think that those kinds of texts may take up about five percent of what goes on. Classes are full of different kinds of itemized texts, worksheets and fill-in-the-blank activities — language classrooms and all kinds of classrooms. I think we need a language for talking not just about the events but the kinds of texts themselves. I think the way we treat literacy is very consistent with the whole testing enterprise that's so dominant. We break up literacy into components and that's potentially the most consistent thing that we're communicating about literacy, despite what we say and despite the ideology that's written into our education code.

*Olsher: You've done a lot of your own research as well as advising graduate students studying a variety of classroom contexts. How did you first get interested in this kind of close analysis of classroom discourse?*

Poole: Well, I think education in a sense has always been my focus. I had taught ESL for a long time before I started graduate school and then of course initially most of the research I was exposed to was in an experimental paradigm. Then when I came across interactional analysis and I read a couple of studies it seemed as though the data and analysis illuminated what was actually going on. I was uncomfortable with what seemed to me to be hidden in so much quantitative research. I felt that I could ask and answer the kinds of questions I had by looking at what actually went on in the interaction rather than by setting up some kind of experimental situation which may or may not bear much resemblance to the natural one. There are a couple of papers that were really influential to me personally. One by Griffin and Humphrey (1978) that came out of the lab here in San Diego — it was an analysis of an after school reading program, and full of turn-by-turn analysis but from an educational perspective and I think I was taken by what they were able to show was going on with these kids. It seemed like a more in-depth approach to what people do in a classroom than anything I had come across before. Another paper that I read around the same time was one that Charles Goodwin (1987) wrote about a backyard picnic conversation on an auto race. I read those two papers at about the same time and both of them gave me a sense of what you can accomplish through a very close interactional focus. It seemed like it held a lot of promise. Then when I was exposed to Elinor Ochs' framework and the issues of language and culture that converged in novice-expert situations and the profound things that were going on in language, I saw what she had done by blend-

ing that with the interactional research.

Olsher: *I wonder if you could comment on the influences of culture and language socialization in language classrooms.*

Poole: It has seemed to me over the last few years that we need to do classroom discourse studies outside English medium environments. I understand classrooms to be culturally embedded, so if we are going to understand a language classroom, particularly one where the teacher brings different cultural expectations from the students, we need to look at classrooms in other kinds of cultural settings. Several of my graduate students who are non-native speakers of English have been looking at different kinds of non-English speaking classrooms. It's very informative to me to consider the kind of organizational analysis that Mehan originally did, which I think accounts for lots of teacher-student talk in the United States. If you try to take that model and apply it to other cultural contexts, a lot of differences emerge. For example, one of my students who did a study in San Diego of a Japanese Saturday school found the teachers to ask a lot of what she called "rhetorical questions," where no answer is expected and where the teacher actually gives the answer. This happened over and over again. She looked at first grade and sixth grade classrooms and in the first grade the kids were still answering, but by sixth grade they virtually never answered. She also looked at a community college where there was a Japanese teacher of American students and she found a lot of overlap in that R-slot of the IRE. The American students would come in and give an answer because that was their expectation, but the teacher wasn't waiting for an answer, so the teacher's answer would overlap with the students'. I have another student who's studying TEFL classrooms in Taiwan and found that instead of IRE sequences, the teacher replies together with the students, so there's usually no need to come in with an evaluation. I think this kind of understanding of the kinds of interactional norms our students bring to our classes can go a long way toward overcoming stereotypes, toward informing teachers and potentially giving them tools for communicating better with their students. You have the kind of stereotype among ESL teachers of quiet Asian students—that they don't want to talk—but if you look at interactional patterns in the kinds of classrooms where they were originally socialized, it makes perfect sense. I think the patterns of interaction in other cultural contexts are going to be consistent with beliefs and values of that society. Then in ESL classrooms here in the States you get a convergence of different expectations of what's supposed to happen interactionally that can be difficult for the students.

Olsher: *What you're saying is that there's a real complexity to what may be going on culturally in an ESL classroom.*

Poole: Yeah, especially if you have multiple cultures, which is often the case. I

think that in terms of teacher training it's been a real loss that there's so little work on classrooms outside the English speaking environment or any kind of comparison that would illuminate for teachers what kinds of expectations students might bring, or what a classroom is supposed to be in another society.

Olsher: *You raise a very interesting issue of different classroom interactional norms across different cultures. Would you like to comment further about this?*

Poole: We could probably claim that IRE is a kind of dominant sequence in the US and most other English speaking environments, but I am thinking that there may be different dominant sequences in other cultural environments.

Olsher: *So the IRE framework may be an English language or Western norm?*

Poole: At least as we've studied it so far. But some of this research I'm seeing suggests that it's certainly not universal, that there are almost micro-level ways that it differs, but that it does differ. It differs in ways that I think can contribute to inaccurate assessments of students, and it also differs in ways that reflect larger cultural issues and values.

Olsher: *You have studied discourse in both L1 and L2 classrooms. What do you have to say about the similarities or differences between these class environments?*

Poole: It's a huge question. First of all, I'm going to restrict my answer to ESL classrooms in the United States just to narrow it. But even narrowing it that much, there is a huge range of types of L2 classrooms and classes. I'd say to begin with though that there does seem to be an underlying interactional organization that pervades many different types of classes. The organization of talk in classrooms tends to be similar, whether it's a language classroom or not.

Olsher: *What is different about the L2 classroom though?*

Poole: I think there's a fundamental problem in language classrooms. It's that as language teachers we want to enable our students to use language in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes in a variety of situations, but we're stuck in a classroom. Classrooms by their very nature constitute a certain kind of interactional context, so by virtue of it being a classroom you've got that overwhelming IRE sequence at work and the kinds of interactional opportunities the students have in a classroom can be somewhat limited. In some of my work what I've said is that in lots of classes, students mostly contribute only in the reply move slot, so that the kinds of interactional acts that they can construct are necessarily limited. That flies in the face of what we're trying to do as language teachers, and I think that's one reason the communicative approach has taken hold as strongly as it has



—because it does encourage teachers to set up different kinds of interactional arrangements. That's been one of my interests — looking at what it is that students can do when you take them out of the teacher-fronted environment and what kinds of interactional opportunities they have.

*Olsher: Can you say more about the distinction between L1 and L2 classrooms?*

Poole: In a state like California where you've got a huge proportion of students not only in K-12, but also in the higher education segments, whose first language is not English, the distinction between L1 and L2 classrooms gets blurry.

*Olsher: Is there still a distinction to be made between mainstream or L1 classrooms and ESL or L2 classrooms in California schools?*

Poole: There is, but I think the boundaries are becoming increasingly fuzzy. In addition to that you have large populations of students who may not speak the prestige variety of English, and so they're bringing a different sort of linguistic diversity to the classroom. We have an incredible amount of linguistic diversity in California classes and speakers of languages other than English are one sort. Most of them are infused throughout all the classes so that's why I say it's getting more and more difficult to find classes that are purely one or the other. Certainly language teaching needs to occur, but identifying a clearly defined class that is either a language class or not is going to be more and more difficult, at least in the K-12 setting.

*Olsher: How do you think interactional research can contribute to the enterprise of language education, either in California or in a more global sense?*

Poole: We have a lot of assumptions in our field of ESL or TESL and I'd like to see many of them examined. For example, one of my students did of an interactional analysis of a jigsaw reading activity to show what sometimes happens in collaborative learning. The jigsaw study took the kind of activity that the communicative approach advocates and really put it under the microscope and looked at different configurations of it and I think our whole field is just ripe for that kind of analysis. I'd like to see the language and content issue really examined in context, to look at the place of language teaching in the milieu of content-based instruction. The other thing I feel fairly strongly about is that I'd like for this kind of research to be if not immediately available to teachers at least translatable to them so that practitioners can in some way make use of it.



## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this interview, Dr. Poole makes a case for the value of the speech-event framework for analyzing classroom discourse as well as language socialization theory and the application of Heath's notion of a literacy event, and explains that work with the data of classroom interactions for a particular study has shaped the research questions as well as the kinds of analysis in her work. A speech event approach has informed her exploration of the ways societal goals are embodied in the specifics of an interaction. Language socialization theory, Poole explains, promises a deeper view into the ways different cultural norms of classroom interaction come about and the ways values of students' home cultures may influence the complexity of interactions in ESL classrooms in the US. Concerning the difference between L2 and L1 classrooms, she suggests that in California, the linguistic diversity throughout elementary and secondary levels makes such distinctions problematic. In her own work, she explains that the notion of a literacy event, coupled with the tools of discourse analysis, provides a window onto the complex interdependence of spoken and written language in classroom interactions. She calls for more interactional research into classrooms in non-English speaking cultures, where she suggests the norms of interaction between teachers and students may vary in subtle but significant ways. She also calls for more close analysis of ESL classroom discourse to investigate many of the assumptions of TESOL pedagogy. Her own ongoing research on literacy events promises to enhance our understanding of the social uses of literacy, from both pedagogical and cultural perspectives.

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# Literacy and Culture in the Classroom: An Interview with Kris Gutierrez

Myrna Gwen Turner  
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## PROFILE

Kris Gutierrez is an Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies and head of the division of Administration, Curriculum, and Teaching Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her experience as director of a freshman writing program for provisionally admitted students sparked her interest in the issue of literacy, and her concern over the gate-keeping function of literacy led her to Ph.D. research in rhetoric and composition at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Prof. Gutierrez' literacy work has continued to investigate the issues of identity, marginalization, social justice, and power relations in the classroom. Her studies of the social organization of literacy have centered around the connections between language, culture, and human development. This discourse-based research informs teachers of the social practices of the classroom by examining the social and cognitive consequences of literacy practices.. Prof. Gutierrez' current research investigates effective literacy practices, issues of urban mobility, and the effects of intervention programs on literacy and problem-solving.

## INTRODUCTION

In this interview Prof. Gutierrez discusses the issue of literacy as a gate keeper and how her own experiences as a bilingual Latina and as a teacher of writing led to her interest in sociocultural understandings of literacy and language learning. She emphasizes the importance of discourse-based analysis, its capacity to capture and illustrate for teachers the discursive practices of the classroom and their consequences on literacy learning. Dr. Gutierrez also discusses the issue of high urban mobility and other research projects that she is pursuing that employ a multi-method and multi-disciplinary framework..

## INTERVIEW

Turner: *Could you tell us how your interest in language and literacy began?*

Gutierrez: As a young bilingual child it was difficult not to become acutely aware of the privilege of knowing two languages and to understand quickly the power of

language. Fluency in Spanish allowed me to serve at the age of three and four as translator, cultural broker as it were, for my great grandmother who spoke no English. My languages also created a special place and role in my grandparents' home and gave me access to conversations my parents had—conversations that were not intended for their children's ears. Becoming biliterate was almost inevitable it seemed. There was something wonderful about third and fourth generation Chicano children who could move so easily across these fluid linguistic and cultural borders.

Our rich linguistic resources and literacy skills, however, were neither valued nor utilized in school. In fact, many of us remark that our bilingualism, our biliteracy skills, were beaten out of us. More precisely, we were swatted with a large wooden paddle if we spoke Spanish in school, including on the playground. We lived amidst such powerful contradictions. Fluency in two languages was invaluable in our community and we were praised for it—as long as we used our special knowledge outside of school. What is so ironic, though, is that so many of our European-American peers worked hard to learn Spanish as well; and they did. We lived in a very integrated community (50% White/50% Chicano) so we drew on one another's linguistic and cultural resources in our everyday lives. I think I was a teenager before I realized that "Mexicans" didn't have tea and saffron bread every afternoon as we did with our English landlady.

My interest in literacy clearly was shaped by own experiences at home and school. My father, a copper miner in the local mine, wrote a column in the weekly newspaper on "Americanism"; he was very involved in the Veterans of Foreign Wars and like most Chicanos who fought in WWII very patriotic. I was required to help him conceptualize, write and edit his weekly column. Because language and literacy were such productive tools for me, it came as such a surprise to learn that literacy was the gate keeper or the mechanism that sorted us into our various learning tracks in high school and that influenced the majors we would select in college. I was always the only Chicana in my English major classes.

Turner: *How does the issue of literacy as a gate keeper play out in your work?*

Gutierrez: First I need to give you some background. After I got my Masters, I worked as a director of freshman composition for provisionally admitted, under represented minority university students, including children of poor white migrant workers. It was in this context that I began to look beyond the written text and beyond "deficit-model" theories for answers to students' literacy practices. I was beginning to understand the inextricable links between language, culture, and human development and to focus on the language and literacy practices of the classroom and their relationship to what students learned. I came to understand the explanatory power of other language and learning theories that challenged prevailing classroom literacy practices that regarded these students' linguistic knowledge/practices as liability rather than resource. However, these "deficit" theories

about language and learning became institutionalized in ways that prevented my students from receiving college credit in their college writing courses despite the content and rigorous exit standards of their writing courses. Their literacy skills and practices were deemed “remedial” *a priori* because of who they were racially and ethnically rather than by the literacy skills they had acquired by the end of the courses we developed. People assumed that the students’ literacy skills were necessarily inferior and, thus, that they could not appropriate academic literacy.

*Turner: How did you combat these limited understandings of language learning?*

Gutierrez: Actually, in several ways; we had both political and academic solutions. Even though this was in the late 70’s, we held mass demonstrations protesting the unjust policies of the English Department. The protest resulted in the takeover of the building that housed the College Dean’s office. While this resulted in a temporary stay in the implementation of the policy to de-credit our courses, we were ultimately able to win the “literacy” battle when we were allowed to demonstrate that there was no significant difference in the performance of our students’ exit compositions from those of the regularly admitted students’ writing.

In addition to defining this struggle as a moral and political issue, we were motivated to develop the most academically sound program we could. The writing program’s success, I believe, was clearly attributable to the fact that our pedagogy, our instructional practices, were well grounded in theory and practice. Our teachers were theoretically equipped. We were under such intense and continued scrutiny that it was essential that we understood and incorporated the most current literacy theories and practices. I began my Ph.D. work in rhetoric and composition theory then. That’s when I “discovered” Vygotsky and language socialization theories and began to understand writing as a sociocultural process. The large academic support program that I then directed became a necessary and natural laboratory for my examination. These sociocultural understandings of learning and language learning in particular helped me articulate what I was observing in the everyday literacy practices of my students. I began looking not just at language but through language to document the relationship between students’ current literacy practices and the literacy practices of the remedial courses to which they had been confined most of their academic lives. I also recognized that the writing theories that were so much a part of early writing research in the late 70’s and 80’s were ineffective, or at least incomplete, models for capturing the sociocultural nature of the teaching and learning of literacy. To understand better the related issues of identity, marginalization, social justice, and power relations in the classroom, I also became very interested in classroom discourse, social theories, and critical pedagogy.

*Turner: How did you build on these sociocultural views to develop your current perspective?*



Gutierrez: I think there was a natural evolution from my training in literacy and qualitative research methods to my interest in issues of culture and human development. I accepted a post-doctoral fellowship at UCLA to study with Ron Gallimore and the Sociobehavioral Research Group. It was serendipitous that I decided during my post-doc to audit courses taught by Alessandro Duranti, Tom Weisner and subsequently audited several classes with Elinor Ochs. These classes spoke to me in ways that no other courses had. Their work related more to my own interests and studies and introduced me to new methodologies for unpacking the literacy practices of urban schools. I began to use discourse analysis in particular to unravel the processes of literacy learning in the classroom. It's no wonder that CLIC (UCLA's interdisciplinary Center for Language, Interaction, and Culture) feels so much like home to me.

Turner: *How have you incorporated these theories into your current work?*

Gutierrez: My work focuses on the social practices of the classroom, that is, the curriculum and instruction in the domain of literacy. In particular, my research (with coauthors Joanne Larson, Betsy Rymes, and Lynda Stone) examines the social and cognitive consequences of literacy practices in urban school contexts. As obvious as it may seem, curriculum studies, literacy studies and their practices have, by and large, had little to do with one another. Curriculum, informed by sociology of education, has not in any sustained way addressed the questions of language and the central role language plays in the social construction of curriculum. Recent studies of literacy, on the other hand, have not yet acknowledged how literacy curriculum shapes and is shaped by the discursive practices in the classroom. Consequently, I think the essential relationship between literacy learning and the social practices of the classroom has not been substantively examined.

While many studies have shed significant insight into literacy learning, most have not used micro analysis to illustrate the complexity of classroom communities and their social organization of learning. In response to this need, I posit a situated theory of literacy learning that argues that the development of literacy arises from the child's intellectual and communicative participation within the context of the classroom community and its forms of literacy activity. To accomplish this, my research integrates sociocultural theories of learning and language and social theory to examine classroom social practices and their relationship to literacy learning. My work is ethnographic in nature and I rely on discourse analytic strategies to examine these classroom practices and processes. Lynda Stone and I argue in one of our recent papers that since we see literacy learning as a social and cultural process that links language and thinking in classroom practices, we need a theoretical perspective that accounts for or acknowledges the interaction between the social milieu and the individual. I think the robustness of the sociocultural perspective is that it allows us to focus our analysis on the mutual and interdependent relationship between the individual and the social world.



Some of the more exciting work that the gang of four has done (Gutierrez, Larson, Rymes, and Stone) examines the various social spaces that constitute classroom life. The issues of time and space, then, become important dimensions in understanding how these multiple spaces overlap with one another, or are laminated—to use Ochs' term—and construct the social practices of the classroom. The concept of the third space, a particular social space we've observed in classrooms in which a productive heteroglossia emerges, has been taken up by both researchers and practitioners. In particular, our work in urban schools has become of particular interest to educators because the issues of equity and excellence have become recurrent themes throughout our study of literacy.

Turner: *Is this why you think classroom teachers are responding to your work?*

Gutierrez: In part I think it's because we share common interests and goals but mostly I think it's because our research is classroom based. We do long-term work in schools. So there's a level of credibility and trust that comes from studying teaching and learning *in situ*. Certainly, the increasingly collaborative nature of our work, particularly with our more recent projects, leads to more agentive roles for the teachers in constructing the research goals and agenda. In addition, classroom teachers tell me that our microanalysis makes visible what was previously invisible to them in much of educational research. They can finally see, they say, what researchers have been talking about and more important, know then how to intervene in their own teaching processes. The use of ethnography and discourse analysis, in particular, has allowed us to talk about sensitive issues such as power and opportunity to learn and to show how these phenomena are socially constituted. By illustrating these processes as they naturally occur, we don't have to use labels such as racism and bad teaching; instead, we can show the social and cognitive consequences of particular literacy instructional practices. By focusing on the consequences of classroom practices, teacher-bashing (of which educational researchers are often accused) is minimized, if not eliminated. This focus is congruent with my goal to change classroom practice. Another central goal, of course, is to understand better literacy development in school contexts.

Turner: *Your research, then, actually addresses two distinct yet overlapping communities?*

Gutierrez: Yes, I have to meet the rigorous demands of the research community and another set of rigorous albeit different demands from practitioners. To combat what I consider to be the largely atheoretical orientation of most teacher-training programs, I consciously reject teacher training practices that do not treat teachers as intellectuals. Consequently, I always articulate the theories that guide my work in the various articles I publish and in the talks I give to classroom teachers. It is for these reasons as well that courses I have offered to novice teachers are de-

signed to help them develop a theoretical and methodological tool kit for conducting reflective practice. Teachers find ethnographic research methods and discourse analytic strategies particularly useful to them as they attempt to understand and change their own practices.

Most of my teaching, though, is with Ph.D. students who are very interested in theory and the links between theory, policy, and practice. Because education as a field is becoming multidisciplinary, so is the training, then, our students receive. For example, our work in literacy, although grounded in cultural-historical theories of development, is informed by a hybrid approach or framework that systematically and strategically blends theoretical constructs from linguistic, social, psychological, and anthropological theories. I'm trying to construct for my students in education a community that rejects traditionally defined intellectual and theoretical boundaries. This is also one of the many reasons we participate in a community like CLIC.

Turner: *What research projects has this theoretical orientation resulted in?*

Gutierrez: I currently have three projects. I have a five year research project, funded by the United States Department of Education, to study effective literacy practices in three local districts. In this project, I hope to develop a more dynamic and situated understanding of what counts as effective practice across three very different learning communities. We're currently in our third year of funding. A second project emerged from this study. In the course of studying effective practice, one of our school principals challenged us to define and examine effective practice in the context of perhaps the most serious constraint facing urban schools—the issue of high urban mobility. Urban schools in Los Angeles, and in many states across the nation, experience turnover rates as high as 60-80% from the beginning to the end of the school year. We are now asking, how do you construct and sustain effective learning communities when the community is constantly in flux?

Our newest project (UC Links), part of a UC system wide effort spearheaded by Michael Cole of the Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition at UC San Diego, is designed to create a new activity system or a new cultural setting in the local community that transforms learning for both undergraduate and graduate UCLA students and elementary school students in one urban Los Angeles school. The intervention, an after-school program, uses computer-mediated activity to enhance literacy and problem-solving abilities for its participants. We are also interested in the issues of transferability and sustainability. To that end, we are studying how the knowledge and skills children learn in the after-school activity are imported into the classroom. Similarly, we are interested in how current classroom practices make use of or under utilize what children learn through participation in our project. Ultimately, we are concerned with how such projects can change school culture and how the local community can collaborate and maintain this project over time. In this way, my work is always action-oriented.

Turner: *What are the implications, then, for your future work?*

Gutierrez: Clearly, I see doing much more collaborative work with colleagues from other disciplines. The study of urban mobility, for example, should include colleagues from urban planning, sociology, anthropology, applied linguistics, public health, and education—or a variety of other combinations. I'd like to work on research projects that have these multiple layers of complexity and that have some significant social impact on the research and local community.

**Myrna Gwen Turner** is a graduate student in UCLA's department of TESL & Applied Linguistics. Her current research investigates knowledge displays among novice computer users.

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## Language as Instinct: A Socio-Cultural Perspective (a review essay)

*The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* by  
Steven Pinker. New York: William Morrow, 1994. Pp. 494.

Reviewed by David E. C. Nordlund  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

Note to the reader: *Issues in Applied Linguistics* invites your commentary on *The Language Instinct*. In our next issues we will publish selected responses to this review. Please submit your essays to Beth Gregory, Book Review Editor, *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 3300 Rolfe Hall, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1531.

### INTRODUCTION

Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct* (1994) will, for some time to come, continue to provoke lively discussion among readers of varied backgrounds. Most issues concerned with language, regardless of intellectual discipline, will spark debate and even division: bilingualism and education, the nationalization of the English language in the United States, race relations, religious discourse, etc. The dialectic value of language as either a mechanism of unification or one of separatism is geographically ubiquitous. While a significant number of Americans lobby for the nationalization of English, the citizens of Quebec narrowly voted in favor of remaining a part of English-speaking Canada, though they will never cease to speak French as their mother tongue. Pinker, a native of Quebec, writes that "differences in language lead to differences in ethnic identification" (p. 241). As Californians hotly debate the merits of bilingual education, Galicians, Basques, Catalonians, and Valencians in Spain have a constitutional right to educate their children in their regional language. On a larger scale, the Catholic church's Vatican II-mandated use of vernacular language has produced one of the biggest linguistic changes in the history of man (I mean mankind...no, humankind...no, (wo)mankind...or, peoplekind?).

As we have just noted, even a single word can throw us a linguistic curve. Roland Barthes (1970) once commented that "we all perhaps reveal more by the words that we *avoid* than by the words that we use" (p. 146). A small child talking to an adult, an employee to an employer, an athlete to a referee all know that saying the "f-word" will result in some type of punishment. As the O. J. Simpson murder trial made obvious, saying the "n-word" in many contexts is extremely offensive and suggests racial bigotry.



## LANGUAGE, INSTINCT, AND THE ISSUE OF DEFINITION

If, as Nietzsche suggested, "knowledge is power," then language is the conveyor of power. Not only is Pinker's work, therefore, timely and provocative, it is at its heart concerned with power, or the articulation of influence. Pinker observes: "A common language connects the members of a community into an information-sharing network with formidable collective powers" (p. 16). It is precisely his concern with language that makes Pinker's study fundamentally flawed, though very useful in the larger disciplines of cognitive science and evolutionary linguistics. While the author wisely supplies the reader with a glossary of key terms, he fails to explicitly define what he means by "language" and "instinct." The subtitle of Pinker's book, *How the Mind Creates Language*, is of no help. In fact, it only adds to the confusion. What does Pinker mean by language, instinct, and mind? Is "language" the same as mental and generative "grammar"? Is an "instinct" "created" by one's "mind" or by one's brain? After all, we all have a brain of our own, but does everyone have a mind of their own? Pinker could have just as easily titled his book, *The Grammar Instinct: How the Brain Produces Generative Grammar*.

Given that Pinker fails to explicitly define his most basic terms, we are left with the task of deducing definitions. Literary critic Tzvetan Todorov (1970) defines language as "the medium of the poet or the work" (p. 125); while for Northrop Frye (1957) language is wherever an "autonomous verbal structure" is lacking (p. 74); and for Roland Barthes (1970) *rhetoric* encompasses "a genuine theory of language" (p. 134). Pinker, on the other hand, writes that "Language is not a cultural artifact... it is a distinct piece of the biological makeup of our brains" (p. 18). Language, moreover, is a "biological adaptation to communicate information" as opposed to "an insidious shaper of thought" (p. 19). Language, therefore, is implicitly defined as a communicative information system, while an instinct is a "biological adaptation." (I am sure that those involved in the pedagogical aspects of applied linguistics will be shocked to learn that they are magically teaching the unteachable, that is, an instinct.) We can also conclude that Pinker, despite the use of "Mind" in the subtitle, is primarily concerned with the brain, unless these terms are synonymous for the author. We'll let philosophers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and neurologists debate this point.

Pinker therefore views language as instinctual (biological and evolutionary) and we must question whether or not his assertion is as original as he claims it to be. Although Pinker writes with wit and presents the reader with fascinating case studies, he overlooks the fact that, as told by Herodotus (*The Persian Wars*, Bk. II, pp. 2-3), the first recorded experiment concluding the innate quality of language was performed in the seventh century B.C. by the Egyptian King Psamtik (Hunt, 1993, pp. 1-2). Although we can not overlook Pinker's ability to analyze language from the perspective of a cognitive scientist, we should also note that his central thesis is nothing new.



## **PINKER, COGNITIVE SCIENCE, AND THE HUMANITIES**

Pinker's approach, then, to the study of language is firmly planted in his understanding of cognitive science, which "combines tools from psychology, computer science, linguistics, philosophy, and neurobiology to explain the workings of human intelligence" (p. 17; also see pp. 474-75). In open defiance of "the canon of the humanities and social sciences," Pinker comments that language "is no more a cultural invention than is upright posture" (p. 18). Pinker's biological determinism misleads him, however, for soon after he proudly states that Noam Chomsky is "currently among the ten most-cited writers in all of the humanities" (p. 23). It is interesting to observe that Pinker goes full circle in only a matter of a few pages. He first tries to separate cognitive science from the humanities only to later document the importance that Noam Chomsky has within the humanities.

One of the primary flaws of Pinker's work, and perhaps his very way of thinking, is his failure to see that the humanities and cognitive science feed off one another. At a time, though, when the humanities are neglected and even despised by some, Pinker's mistake is perhaps conditioned and encouraged by society in general. In the case of cognitive science, Pinker fails to realize, or prefers not to recognize, that his academic discipline has in part defined and invented itself out of the Formalist and Structuralist branches of artistic criticism (the latter having earlier incorporated the Structural Anthropology of Levi-Strauss). Just as psychoanalysis has greatly benefitted from literary models of illustration and analysis, cognitive science and different aesthetic discourses have been mutually relevant. That is, *if* there is indeed a language instinct, isn't there also an artistic or aesthetic instinct? When prehistoric peoples painted their communal activities inside the Alta Mira caves of northern Spain, weren't they expressing themselves both in terms of communication and aesthetic sensibilities?

## **ARE WE ONLY BIOLOGY? OR BIOLOGY AND CULTURE?**

It is quite possible that we are gifted with a language (or communication?) instinct, yet it is an error not to recognize and evaluate the role of a creative/aesthetic drive which defines us in light of our self-image and cultural relationships. That is, we are both biology and culture. Todorov (1970) remarks that "Man has made himself from the beginning through language" (p. 125). While Pinker attempts to demonstrate the biological aspects of our relationship to language, he fails to adequately include the social and cultural qualities fundamental to our development as communicative beings. Pinker writes: "The muteness of wild children in one sense emphasizes the role of nurture over nature in language development, but I think we gain more insight by thinking around that tired dichotomy" (p. 277). Why is this a "tired dichotomy"? How can one "think around it"? Or is it simply that Pinker tries to avoid an entirely relevant issue that undercuts his biological determinism? Psychologist Morton Hunt comments: "we know from mod-

ern studies of children brought up under conditions of isolation that there is no innate language and that children who hear no speech never speak" (p. 2).

But this is only one issue connected to the general area of sociocultural communication, which includes artistic or aesthetic expression. When the industrious and artistic cave dwellers of Alta Mira painted their collective sociocultural experiences, their children no doubt followed their elders' example. From that crucial moment thousands of years ago until today Spain has produced artists of enormous innovation: Velázquez, Goya, Miró, Picasso, and Dalí to name just a few. Pinker makes an effort to attach cognitive science to Evolutionary Psychology (ch. 13), where "culture is given its due" (p. 411), yet fails to elaborate, as if the very concept of cultural expression were a threat to cognitive science. Pinker comments that "if you really doubt that we have botany instincts, consider one of the oddest of human motives: looking at flowers" (p. 426). Are, then, observing a painting of Van Gogh's sunflowers, reading a beautiful sonnet by Shakespeare, listening to a delightful piano concerto, watching a romantic movie or play "odd" activities for the human species? Pinker misses the point: When we look at flowers we are neither employing a botany instinct nor are we engaged in an "odd" activity. We are, just as when we are involved in the above-mentioned activities, reacting to an aesthetic instinct. Since any aesthetic expression is primarily a mechanism of communication, Pinker errs in his attempt to devalue cultural expressions in favor of the purely biological aspects of language (communication). Again, we are biology and culture, making the empirical and the aesthetic complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Pinker titles his first chapter "An Instinct to Acquire an Art," yet fails to live up to this reality.

### SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE AS AESTHETIC DISCOURSE

While Pinker avoids a worthwhile discussion concerning the sociocultural aspects of language in general and an aesthetic drive in particular, he employs important literary figures to illustrate his arguments, ranging from Chaucer and Shakespeare to Oscar Wilde and Joan Didion. On his eighty-fifth birthday, Robert Frost commented that "Science cannot be scientific about poetry, but poetry can be poetical about science. It's bigger, more inclusive" (cited in Holland, 1988, p. 34). Frost is correct to assert that poetry (and literature in general) is more inclusive than science, but we should note that the poet uses a *philosophical* discourse to make his point. The observation by Frost illustrates what French philosopher Jean Hyppolite (1970) states concerning the interrelation between language-literature-philosophy: "the speech about the speech is an integral part of philosophic language" (p. 159). Jacques Lacan (1970) notes that to express ourselves and to structure our language we often need to employ other styles of discourse, "from the place of the Other" (p. 186). That is why Frost contrasts poetry and science in philosophical terms and why Pinker, perhaps without realizing it, uses a literary discourse to explain biology and cognitive science.

Not only does he illustrate his points with the help of literary authors, but Pinker also uses poetry itself to explain verbal irregularity (p. 139), and even expropriates the very discourse of poetics to study phonetics (ch. 6). In short, Pinker shifts his "language instinct" towards the structural poetics of Dámaso Alonso (1950), Jakobson/Halle (1956), Lotman (1970), Ruwet (1970), Jameson (1972), and Culler (1975). We should also note that while Pinker asserts that language "is not a manifestation of a general capacity to use symbols" (pp. 18-19), he nevertheless embraces the "theory of thinking called 'the physical symbol system hypothesis' or the 'computational' or 'representational' theory of mind," so "fundamental to cognitive science" (pp. 77-78). Not only is this approach fundamental to the field of cognitive science, but it is also a fundamental source of aesthetic criticism: semiotics. By commenting on the relationship between thinking, viewing, and language through symbolic representation, Pinker could have applied the theories of not only Alonso, but those of Barthes (1953, 1964), Kristeva (1969), and Eco (1979), among others. It is ironic, therefore, that while Pinker attempts to sterilize his work with the supposed authority of science, he uses sociocultural models to cement his discourse. If imitation is one of the highest compliments, then Pinker unknowingly strengthens the relevance of cultural/aesthetic expression within the sphere of science.

### FINAL THOUGHTS: A PROGRAM FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF AESTHETIC COGNITION

Without doubt, Pinker's work will help the reader understand why we speak the way we do. Just as importantly, though, *The Language Instinct* will also force the curious reader to ask how cognitive science and aesthetic expression interact with each other. That is, is the creative process an instinct, or is it acquired? How and why does our brain and mind form and react to cultural expressions such as poetry, music, and the plastic arts? Ruqaiya Hasan (1989) asserts that language is a social semiotic, and that "The relationship between language and culture is symbiotic: the one lives through the other" (p. 101). Ray Jackendoff and Fred Lerdahl (1980) have shown that there is a "deep parallel" between language and music; that the models of Chomskian linguistics can be applied to demonstrate a "Generative Music Theory." And what of the plastic arts? If language embodies an evolutionary process of communication, can the same be said of art? Did art develop before language? Or, vice-versa? Or does their evolution parallel each other?

Pinker demonstrates how language can be used to diagnose cognitive and mental disorders, yet fails to clarify the therapeutic quality of language. Just as a work of art or a musical piece can be therapeutic to the socially or mentally afflicted, couldn't language itself, from psychoanalysis to poetry, serve a similar purpose? Just as a schizophrenic finds relief in drawing a flower or painting a family member, wouldn't the same patient benefit from experimenting with poetic

expression? It is ironic that Pinker's effort to "de-culturize" language results in a deeper appreciation of language as a powerful tool of acculturation for young and old, healthy and ill.

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***Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Toward an Understanding of Voice*** by Dell Hymes. London, UK and Bristol, PA : Taylor & Francis (Critical Perspectives on Literacy and Education series), 1996. Pp. xiv+258pp.

Reviewed by Olga Solomon  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

The view of language as inseparable from its speakers and from its context has always been present in linguistics, but it has not always been popular. When the Chomskian revolution in the 60's swept away the achievements of the structuralists (compromised by their theoretical allegiance with Skinnerian behaviorism), graduate students of child language acquisition were advised against mentioning in their dissertation the child as an active learner, or the family and the community as the people whose language the child was learning. With a vantage point from the present situation in the field, *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality* gives a historical perspective on the study of situated language use since the 1970's, reaffirming the theoretical and political value of linguistic studies outside of the generative grammar movement. Dell Hymes takes a strong and original stance, viewing social science as a mediating practice, as activism and intervention, and social scientists as practitioners, as well as researchers.

The book is a collection of articles written at different times and for different occasions. They are divided into three thematic parts: Part I, Ethnography; Part II, Linguistics; and Part III, Narrative and Inequality. In "What is Ethnography" (Chapter 1, Part I), Hymes contrasts ethnography as a mode of research with experimental design and quantitative measurement methods. Employing participation and observation, "comprehensive" ethnography of the early days (1850's) was used by L. H. Morgan to record kinship terminology of the Iroquois Indians. Two aspects of Morgan's work laid the foundation of contemporary ethnography as an essential tool for research: his development of contrastive insight, and his combined quest for specific information and general interpretation.

"Comprehensive" ethnography and "topic-oriented" ethnography led to significant advances in the understanding of culture and prepared the way for "hypothesis-oriented" ethnography, which Hymes believes to be the next stage in the evolution of the field. Using this conceptual paradigm Hymes proposes to analyze schooling in America the way anthropologists have studied kinship systems, i.e. by constructing a typology. His goal is to determine what kinds of schools there are. Such a typology must be useful for a certain purpose, i.e. for research on literacy. As a consequence, constructing such a typology is a necessarily dialectical, feedback process. The initial questions may change during the course of



inquiry—a revolutionary concept for traditional science—in this way establishing the scientific validity of the method. This chapter makes evident the significant contribution that ethnography brings to research in education.

Chapter Two, "Educational Ethnology," brings to attention the issues that ethnography alone may have left unexamined. The suggestion made in Chapter One, that ethnography can be relevant for research on education, resurfaces in this chapter: The school system in America can be understood through the same methods used to study kinship structures around the world. Hymes criticizes the research view of schools as merely settings for the interaction of recurrent variables and regrets the lack of cumulative, longitudinal studies of individual schools or school systems in educational research. He calls for a comparative perspective, together with a knowledge of sociocultural context, to be brought into the analysis of schooling in America. In this sense, according to Hymes, the "ethnological dimension links anthropology of education with social history, through the ways in which larger forces for socialization, institutionalization, reproduction of an existing order, are expressed and interpreted in specific settings" (p. 19). This link is not only a theoretical notion—it brings with it the dimension of social usefulness of the research to the school site and to those studied, and the notion that there has to be sustained cooperation between the researchers and the researched. As in many other places throughout the book, Hymes brings in the political implications of scientific investigation. In a democratic society, he writes, there can not be a division of "those who know and those who are known" (p. 21).

In Chapter Three, "Speech and Language: On the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Speakers," Hymes examines the sources of inequality in the way linguistic resources are distributed in society. His point of departure is a criticism of Chomsky's Russel lectures, given in 1971. In contrast to Chomsky, Hymes views language as a human problem, which can be fruitfully analyzed along four broad dimensions: diversity, medium, structure and function. Writing on the first of these dimensions, "diversity," Hymes questions the adequacy of such concepts as "speech community," "mutual intelligibility," and "the English language." He calls for thinking of a community as possessing not a single language, but a repertoire of ways of speaking, speech styles with corresponding contexts of discourse and relations of appropriateness. In his analysis of the next dimension, "the medium of language," Hymes discusses the relationship between speech and writing, describing both as modes of action, as one or another resource within the communicative repertoire. He then examines the communicative and social consequences for a choice of medium in a particular community, with its norms for performance and interpretation. Within Hymes' discussion of the four dimensions of language, the section entitled "Overcoming the Structure of Language" is the most theoretically original and challenging in the book. Here he quotes a multitude of studies which may impress even the most erudite reader. He credits Whorf (who referred to the necessary organization of speaking as "a fashion of speaking") with anticipating the sociolinguistic concept of "ways of speaking" and gives an extensive

critique of the theories of Basil Bernstein and Jurgen Habermas.

Chapter 4 reflects the author's political stance as early as its title: "Report from an Underdeveloped Country: Toward Linguistic Competence in the United States." This chapter originated as a lecture given in Amsterdam in 1975, and later published there, hence the apparent spatial disjuncture of the title. It would certainly have had an even more sarcastic and poignant tone had it been directed to an audience in the US: a living illustration of language in context. However, it is now presented to an American audience, which has to bear the consequences of living in a country called "underdeveloped" by the author. Why such a claim? Hymes argues that "with regard to knowledge of itself in terms of language the United States remains a largely underdeveloped country." In connection with this lack of linguistic self-knowledge, Hymes introduces a concept of voice through the notion of negative and positive freedom. If negative freedom is "the freedom from denial of opportunity due to something linguistic, whether in speaking or reading and writing," and positive freedom is "the freedom for satisfaction in the use of language," then the two kinds of freedom are united in the concept of voice: "freedom to have one's voice heard, freedom to develop a voice worth hearing" (p. 64). Unfortunately, despite the volume's subtitle "Toward an Understanding of Voice," Hymes fails to elaborate on this important concept.

Hymes offers a remedial solution to the language situation in the US by identifying five tasks for current researchers of language and culture. He relates these tasks to social issues, discussing varieties of Indian English, Spanish, Black English, and Hawaiian Creole English; ethnic identities, class, age, gender; classroom interaction and Goffman's work on politeness; and politics of bilingual education and cultural hegemony through language, to name only a few. Addressing one task, the "Critique of Sociology," he provides another analysis of Bernstein's and Habermas' work, and under "Critique of Linguistics," he takes issue with Chomsky's theoretical approach. In "Reshaping the Study of Language," (task 5), Hymes looks into the future with hope for "the organization of language in discourse" as the new frontier of research, a frontier to be explored through "contributions from many disciplines" (p. 99).

Part III, "Narrative and Inequality," constitutes one half of the book, and it has an autonomous position, both thematically and in terms of Hymes' more personal writing style ("Warm Springs Interlude," p. 117, is an example). It also has a dialogic quality as the author invokes, in the following six chapters, the voices and research of Courtney Cazden, M. Himley, William Labov, and Sarah Michaels. There is a profound richness to Hymes' theoretical views on narrative and its role in human life, which embraces such diverse ideas as ethnopoetics, narrative form as grammar of experience, and the recurrent patterns of narrative organization in different languages, as well as in narratives told by children. "Narrative may be a complementary, or alternative mode of thinking," Hymes writes (p. 114). Narrative in an educational situation can be seen as inferior to other, more cognitive, modes of thought, Hymes claims, as he goes on to ferret out the political and

personal consequences of such a view. "Few live healthy lives with no one to tell what has happened," (p. xii) he writes in the introduction, with the eloquence so characteristic of this latter part of the book. Yet, I found Hymes' analysis of the narratives he studies dissatisfying due to the emphasis on the mode of shaping and the shape itself, and to the analysis outside of the context in which the narratives were told and co-constructed by the participants of the interaction.

This book is an important and welcome contribution to the field of Applied Linguistics, for educators and researchers alike, as it articulates and addresses important practical, as well as theoretical, questions. The book is admirable in its political outspokenness. Hymes' own voice sounds loud and clear, and it will be heard.

***Input and Interaction in Language Acquisition*** edited by Clare Gallaway and Brian J. Richards. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. xv+319.

Reviewed by Hirohide Mori  
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In the field of first language acquisition, a number of researchers have investigated the role of input in interaction and for the last quarter of the century, the book *Talking to Children: Language Input and Acquisition* (Snow & Ferguson, 1977) has served as a foundation for such work. As a follow-up to this volume, *Input and Interaction in Language Acquisition* offers a theoretically coherent collection of research in this broad and diverse field, drawing together the up-to-date results and discussions of current controversies in the research of normal, as well as atypical language learners, in a variety of social contexts and cultures.

After an introduction by Catherine Snow which provides an overview of research on input and interaction over the past twenty years, Gallaway and Richards organize the text into three main parts: Part I: General issues (four articles), Part II: Specific aspects of input and interaction (three articles), and Part III: Types of language learner (three articles).

Part I begins with an article by Julian Pine entitled "The language of primary caregivers," which discusses child-directed speech (CDS), centering around the main question: "What can it [CDS] tell us about the language acquisition process?" (p. 15). This discussion illustrates that there is a shift in research focus from the facilitating effects of CDS on language acquisition to the interactive processes through which children make sense of input. This change in focus has led to a shift from quantitative to qualitative methodology. Pine especially pays attention to stylistic differences of CDS as a promising area of study.

In the article, "The changing role of negative evidence in theories of language development," Jeffrey Sokolov and Catherine Snow review studies on the relationship between negative evidence and learnability. The authors propose a "multiple factors" framework of learnability. This framework illustrates the perspective that language learning involves not only innate but also social factors, and it provides a more complete account of language acquisition processes. However, Sokolov and Snow do not specify the extent of the role of innate constraints, in contrast to the roles of learning mechanisms and parental input.

In "Crosslinguistic and crosscultural aspects of language learning," Elena Lieven discusses a wide range of language acquisition environments which reflect different ideologies and sets of child-rearing practices in different cultures. She concludes that regardless of cultural background, children in any



culture normally learn to talk in culturally organized routines where children are situated in meaningful interaction. But as Lieven cautions in the beginning of the article, there are some major methodological problems which need refinement.

After the preceding articles which address general theoretical issues, Brian Richards discusses methodological requirements in "Child-directed speech and influence on language acquisition: methodology and interpretation." Focusing especially on correlational research, Richards discusses factors which are crucial to interpreting the data. Although this article concludes by stating the need to refine research methods and to use a convergence of correlational, case-study, and experimental approaches, in my opinion, Richards could have provided more guidelines for integrating these approaches. Following the discussion of general issues, the three articles in Part II cover more specific aspects of input and interaction. First, in Michelle Barton and Michael Tomasello's article, "The rest of the family: the role of fathers and siblings in early language development," they relate styles of both fathers and siblings in interacting with babies and effects of such interactions on children's communicative competence, particularly in reference to the "Father Bridge" and the "Sibling Bridge" hypotheses. The most attractive point in this article is Barton and Tomasello's claim that fathers and siblings play roles different from mothers'; fathers' interaction style leads to the development of more linguistic means of communication while siblings' leads to the development of more social and pragmatic skills for communication. Barton and Tomasello conclude that synthesizing research on effects of different conversational partners on child language acquisition will provide us with a more holistic view of linguistic environments for input and interaction studies.

In "Phonetic and prosodic aspects of Baby Talk," Alan Cruttenden explores the evidence for the existence of Baby Talk by categorizing Baby Talk into two systems: Baby Talk Phonetics and Baby Talk Prosody. The author summarizes issues on the universal existence of phonetic and prosodic adjustments in adults' speech to young children, particularly emphasizing near-universal evidence of facilitating features of Baby Talk Prosody.

In contrast to the family contexts discussed in Barton and Tomasello, Peter Geekie and Bridie Raban, in their article, "Language learning at home and school" are concerned with the context of classrooms. Classroom discourse research generally reports that classroom talk is controlled and dominated by teachers. However, by closely examining a writing session in a classroom, Geekie and Raban show that there are different types of classroom talk, several of which are very similar to those found in mother-child talk. This shift in focus of analysis from a global to a particular area of classroom discourse will expose an important role of classroom interaction in language acquisition.

Part III introduces studies of atypical language learners and examines the relationship between input and atypical learners' language acquisition, including second language acquisition. In "Language interaction with atypical language learners," Gina Conti-Ramsden examines research on language-impaired and learning-



disabled children, focusing on mothers' semantically contingent responses and directives to atypical language learners. The author also considers intervention in the parent-atypical child interaction, admitting the lack of sufficient research findings to guide parents for developing the language competence of atypical children. The article concludes that parental input may influence atypical language learners' language development more than that of normal children because of the atypical children's lack of some skills relevant to language learning.

In the article, "Interaction and child deafness," Clare Gallaway and Bencie Woll discuss the study of language acquisition of deaf children using the contrast between deaf and hearing mothers and between sign and spoken language use. This article includes an interesting discussion of the study of sign language acquisition which offers insightful information for research of the development of child language as communication.

The article, "Input and interaction in second language acquisition," by Marjorie Wesche reviews studies on second language input, mainly Foreigner Discourse. In addition, studies of language socialization, input processing, and input enhancement are also introduced as current promising research approaches. Her discussion takes into account both theoretical and practical aspects of second language acquisition.

The final article by Brian Richards and Clare Gallaway, "Conclusions and directions," relates the articles in the book to one another. They suggest, for example, that CDS is multifunctional within the discourse structure, and takes different forms depending on a child's current linguistic system. The authors also provide possible implications of the volume's research for teachers at educational institutions as well as for professionals dealing with atypical language learners.

Gallaway and Richards succeed in providing articles from a variety of research areas, each of which includes a comprehensive review and an assessment of topics on input and interaction in language acquisition. In this sense, I consider this book an invaluable reference for language acquisition researchers as well as an appropriate and well-organized guide for students. However, this book is not entirely representative of the field of language acquisition, and tends more or less toward the non-nativist point of view. In addition, readers might also notice in the discussion of research findings throughout this book some preference for quantitative over qualitative research methodology. It is therefore important to relate readings in this volume to those in the nativist approach or to qualitative research to obtain a more comprehensive view of the field of language acquisition. Overall, *Input and Interaction in Language Acquisition* offers an up-to-date standard source of information for future research in this field.

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